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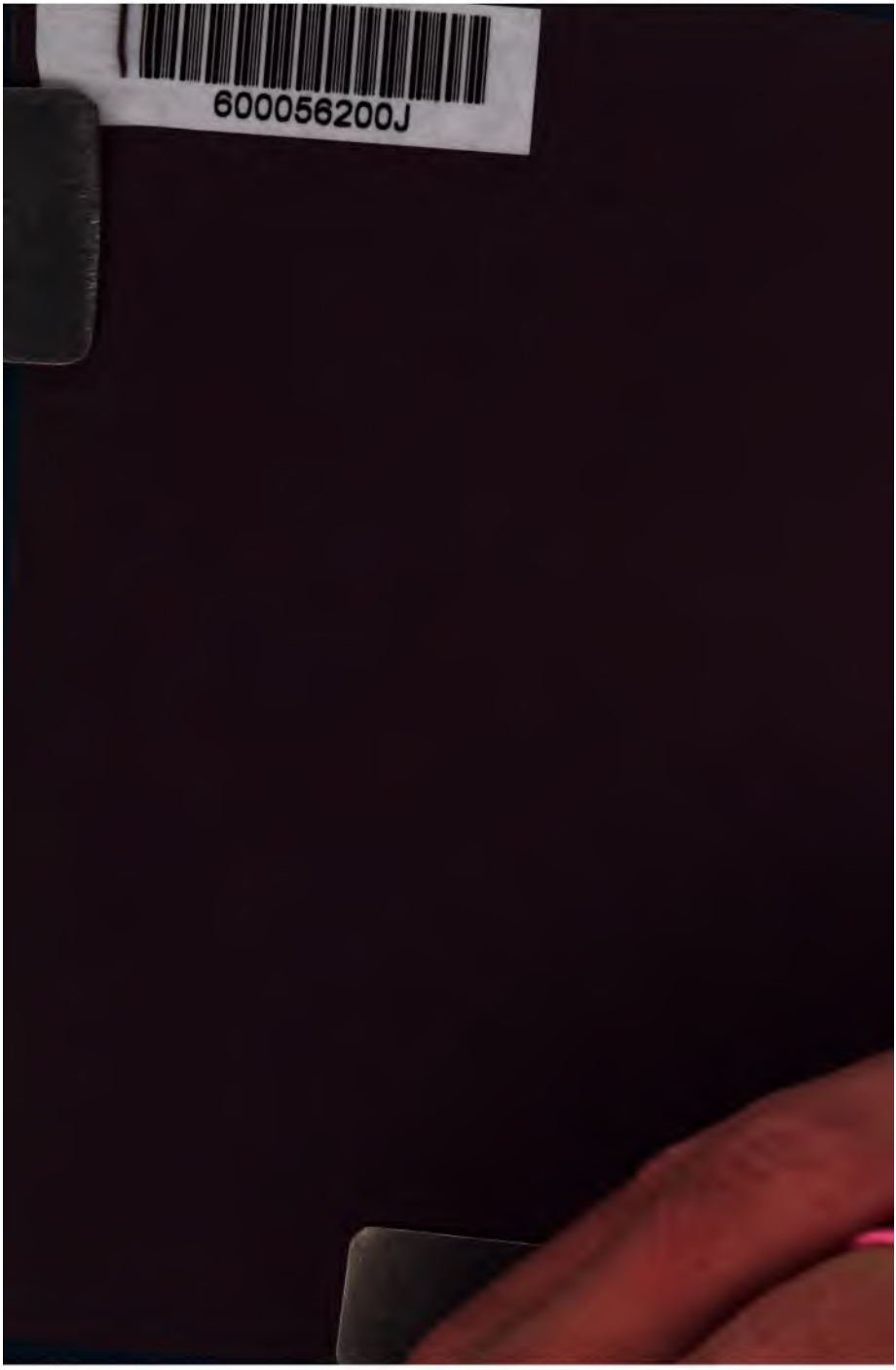
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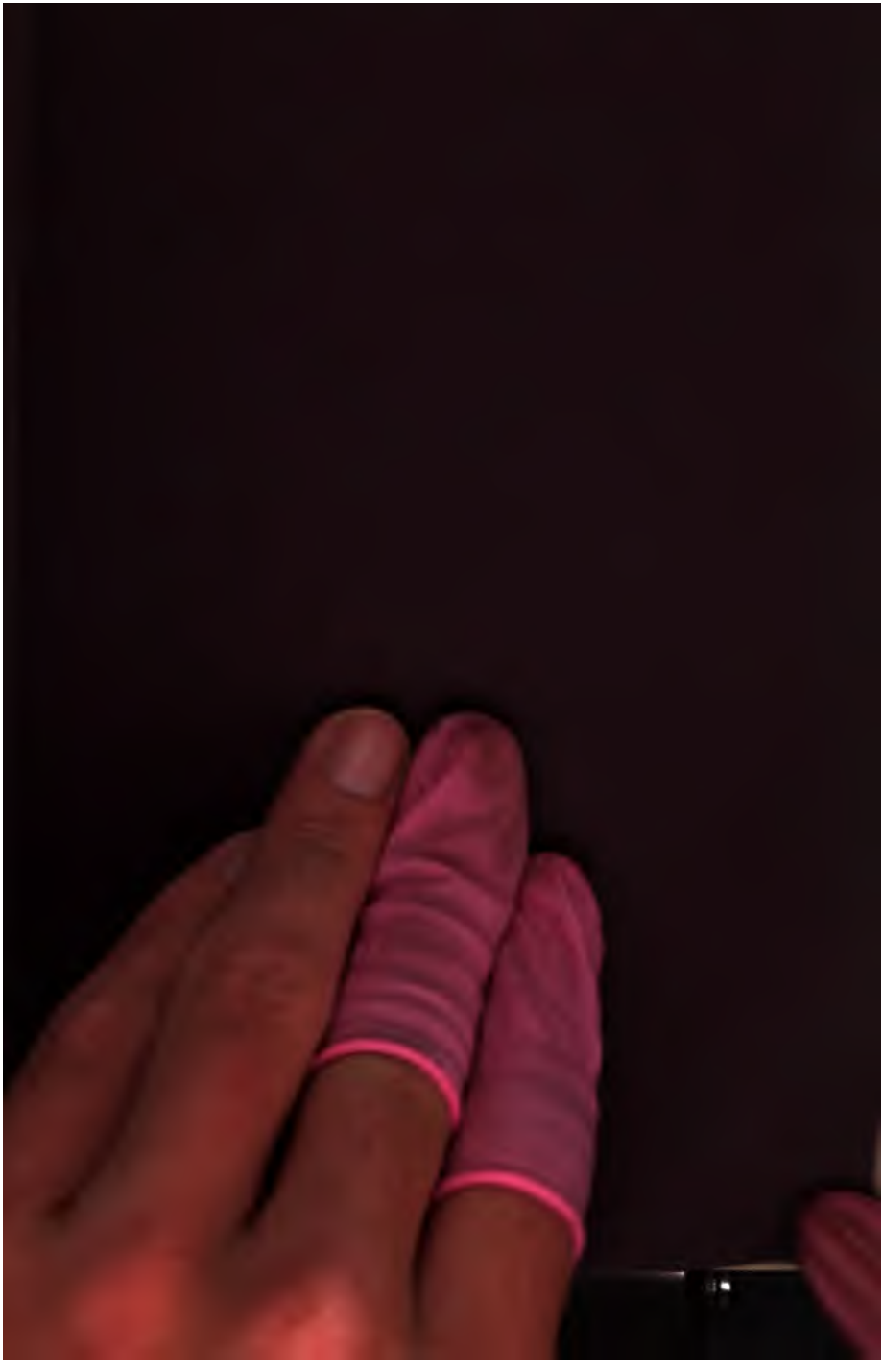

MARGERY TRAVERS.

VOL. III.

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MARGERY TRAVERS

BY

A. E. N. BEWICKE

AUTHOR OF

"THE LAST OF THE JERNINGHAMES,"
"ONWARDS, BUT WHITHER?"
&c. &c.

"How shall a man escape from his ancestors, or draw off from his veins the black drop which he drew from his father's or his mother's life?"
EMERSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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BOOK II.

(CONTINUED.)

TRIED.

MARGERY TRAVERS.

CHAPTER II.

THE SERPENT THAT WARMED ITSELF.

MARGERY, it may be remembered, never had returned Lord Talboys his forty pounds. It was with a strange mixture of shame and exultation that she herself remembered this, when, after that early meeting with Allan in the Park, she decided to break faith with the Earl, as she had before broken faith with Allan. Who does not know the satisfaction of dulling a greater pain by one more acute for the moment, but transitory, and therefore bearable? Whilst tearing her heart out leaving Allan,

trampling her own pride under foot by going to Dalrymple, she gloated over the thought of Lord Talboys' forty pounds, that alone afforded her the power of doing so. They seemed like the last drop in the cup of her wickedness. She was satisfied with herself, that she was outdoing all the Travers that had ever lived before her.

"And, after all, some people do wicked things, carried away, not knowing what they are doing. I know!" said Margery. And before she got to the station, there was her grand manner once more, her head thrown back, her beautifully shaped but stern mouth curved in a mixture of disdain and exultation that she could do what other women, better women—Lottie, for instance—could never dream of doing. "And she will make him so happy," thought Margery. "And they will all like it so much. Oh, how I hate her! I hate her!" and for a moment jealousy got the ascend-

ant, and she hated to think that Lottie's smile might efface the recollection of her own, that Lottie's loving words might obliterate her own cold, hard tones. Then she thought of Dalrymple, and her chest heaved, and Allan and Lottie were both nothing to her, and the colour burnt on her cheeks, and her hand grew hot and trembled.

But what need to paint all the varying emotions through which she passed before she arrived in Florence. The feeling that ever recurred again and again was that she should be safe when she got to Dalrymple, that he would take care of her, and tell her what to do. She had such perfect trust in him. It never seemed to occur to her as possible to do anything but take refuge with the man she loved, yet there were moments when she was overwhelmed with fear, when she trembled to think he might say he could never love

her now, she had extinguished all his love by her unmaidenly conduct. There was plenty of time for her to ring the changes before she arrived in Florence, and beckoning a little carriage, ordered it at once to drive to Dalrymple's studio. She knew where that was, a little outside the town. He had often described its picturesque situation to her, and how he not only painted, but lived there also. She thought she was sure to find him at home this beautiful, sunshiny day, when the clear bright light was too valuable to waste. So she dismissed the little carriage, and there in the dark shadow of an Italian staircase stood Margery, knocking humbly at the artist's door. Dalrymple himself opened it to her, dressed in his painter's blouse, and with brushes and palette in his hand.

"What! Margery!" he cried. "My God! what are you doing here? Come in! Come in at once."

There was the slight sound of rustling, to be heard so often in a figure painter's studio —a model disappearing behind a screen— and Dalrymple himself turned away the picture on which he had been engaged; but Margery did not notice anything of this, her heart was beating too fast for her to notice anything. She stood up now, grand and regal in her beauty, humble in her womanliness, with her head drooped and her colour coming and going.

"I have come, Dal," she said. "You thought I cared only for money and place. You thought I had promised to marry Lord Talboys. I had not, though I did afterwards, when I found you had believed it of me, and gone away and left me. But now I have left them all. I have run away and left them, and come to you. If you love me, I am here, Dal, and you are not depriving me of anything. For I have given up everything. And if you do not

love me, I have still my voice," and she threw her head back, and stood awaiting his answer.

One of Dalrymple's hands was resting on the back of the chair he had been about to hand to her; he was standing motionless, looking at her. Man though he was, he was artist also, and he could not help thinking that that expression and attitude transferred to canvas would be invaluable, that on the stage it would bring the house down. Yet at the same time he was a man too, and fairly astonished and full of curiosity.

"Do you mean to say you have run away?" he asked. "You have broken off your engagement?"

"I left a letter for—for Mr. Stapleton, telling him I was coming to you, and what I said just now, and that if you——"

"Of course I love you," interrupted Dalrymple. "Of course I do. Sit down,

Madge, I do not like to see you standing the first time——" He broke off, and there was a shade of embarrassment upon his mobile features which Margery could not fail to notice. "Only—only you have given up too much for me. I am not worth it, Madge, not worth an Earl's coronet and ever so many thousands a year."

"Dal!" exclaimed Margery, reproachfully, while her colour deepened, and her chest heaved.

Dalrymple hesitated for a moment or two. He was leaning against the window looking at her, and he moved as if to say something; then he looked at her, and checked himself. At last he said, in a muffled voice,

"Oh, Madge, why are you so beautiful? St. Anthony himself could not have withstood a tempter like you."

"A tempter!" cried Margery.

"Did I say tempter?" said Dalrymple, lightly. "Fair enchantress I should have said. What is it men always call their lady-loves? But no word is good enough for you. So you have given up all for me —everything! Oh, Madge, why did I not know you sooner?" The words sounded almost like a moan, and he walked away from her in his agitation. Margery did not know what he was going to do till she saw he was bringing forward a picture that had been placed with its face to the wall. "Look at this wretched daub!" he said. "The best I have been able to make of you."

It was the picture he had begun as the Day-Dream, and Margery was depicted in it in a square cut dress formed out of a gold embroidered Indian shawl, her head resting on her hand, while she sat almost sideways in her high-backed chair, gazing through an open window at a purple Sum-

mer sea. The expression her face wore was that of utter hopelessness.

"Oh, Dal, did I ever look as sad as that?" she asked.

His hands were lightly clasped over the top of the picture, and he was looking into her face.

"Often!" he said, dreamily. "I have often seen you look like that at the Priory."

Margery shuddered, and looked once more at the picture.

"Ah! but I do not like that," she said. In the purple sea she had discovered the broken masts of a sunken vessel. The hopeless eyes in the picture were gazing at them.

"Do you know what I call that picture? I call it 'Wrecked,'" said Dalrymple, moving lightly away. "I have finished it since I came to Florence. Perhaps you will like the other better." The other represented Margery in a violet velvet

dress, and glistening with diamonds, in her hair diamonds, in her ears, round her neck, round her arms. A peacock fan hung from one hand, the other was leaning on the balustrade of a flight of marble steps, in the descent of which she seemed to have paused for an instant. A violet velvet curtain made the background of the picture, in front was a little marble walk, and below that again the deep purple sea.

"I have tried over and over again to put a balustrade between the walk and the sea," said Dalrymple, laughing a little nervously. "For it is certainly most dangerous as it is. But if I put a balustrade it takes up half the picture, and is altogether unmanageable. It is certainly a most villainous composition."

Margery was thinking of Lord Talboys' violet dress. After a few minutes she spoke slowly.

"You might call it 'On the Edge of the

Precipice,' and make it a companion to the other," she said.

Dalrymple winced visibly. Possibly that had been his idea, only he had not liked to say it.

"Well! do not let us waste any more time looking over failures of the past. There must be a *chef-d'œuvre* in the future now," he said, cheerily, and went on still more cheerily now. "And in the meantime have you dined? Have you rested? Are you only just arrived?" Margery explained that she had driven straight from the station. Dalrymple looked concerned. "How frightfully tired you must be! Well, fortunately there is an hotel just near here. Come there and dine, and I will send down for your things. Excuse me for a moment." He disappeared into an inner room, but really only for the moment he had asked for. Before Margery had had time to glance round the studio,

he had re-appeared in a shooting-coat, and with a felt hat in his hand. Margery was not sorry to leave the studio. She had known he was a figure-painter, and having lived so much in Italy, was not prudish about the nude, but it was a trial to her to find the studio of the man she loved hung round with sketches from the life, which were not by any means *chef-d'œuvres*. Dalrymple at once perceived her feeling, and himself looked round with an air of disgust. "This studio is not fit for you," he said. "I must make a clean sweep of all these things. It is like my heart, which also must be swept and garnished to make it worthy of you, Margery." Margery took his hand and pressed it, about to speak. "Just excuse me one instant again," he said. "I have forgotten something," and he shut the studio door, leaving her standing outside on the dark, forlorn-looking staircase. He was more than an instant

gone this time, and there was a look of deep vexation on his face as he came and joined her. "Have you any money?" he asked.

"Yes," said Margery, "plenty."

"Well, that is fortunate, for I am particularly short just now."

Margery thought his vexation accounted for, and that he had gone back to look for money. She made no further comment on it, was only the more loving, as he drew her arm within his, and they walked away together. But Dalrymple did not recover himself till they had ordered dinner in the hotel. Then his spirits began to rise.

At last, after dinner, they sat alone together in the little sitting-room where he had ordered dinner. Then Margery at last broke down as she sobbed out,

"Oh, Dal, I have so often thought if you didn't care about me——"

"If I didn't care about you!" cried Dalrymple, drawing her towards him, and venturing to kiss her—but not as he had once done—reverentially, tenderly now, "I should be fiend as well as fool, if I didn't care for you now, Margery. But I always did. I always loved you better than life, Margery. You do not know what it has cost me——" Then he broke short. After a few minutes he added, in deep, low tones of suppressed feeling, "Never believe that I did not love you, Margery. I may not have acted rightly, I may not be worthy of you. Who could be? But I love you more, far more than I love myself. My love for you is the highest, deepest feeling that I have, it is my life itself."

That evening Margery was very happy, with the happiness that this life sometimes gives its votaries.

But she cried herself to sleep all the same. Dalrymple did not sleep at all.

With folded arms he walked up and down in the moonlight before her window. No one, to look at him, would have said that he was happy.

CHAPTER III.

IN A FALSE POSITION.

"THEN we can be married at once now, Dal?"

It was very gently Margery asked the question. They were sitting together in the little gilded room of a fashionable restaurant, waiting for a midday *déjeuner à la fourchette*. Margery was very simply dressed, yet, when she had entered the restaurant, she had been as well aware as Dalrymple that everyone in it had turned round to look at her. She fancied a few men knew Dalrymple by sight, at least, and she thought it expedient that he should as soon as possible have the

right to protect her from their curiosity.

Dalrymple played with his fork without looking up at her now, he balanced it first on one wrist, then on the other; the coolness of the metal seemed to be agreeable to him—the day was hot for Autumn. At last he said,

"Are you of age, Madge?"

"Of age! Yes, I am twenty-one."

"Are you?" he replied, as if the information did not interest him in the least. "You have not any papers with you to prove that, have you?"

"Are they necessary?"

"It is rather a difficult matter getting married in Italy," said Dalrymple, slowly. "There's the consular marriage, and the religious ceremony, and——"

"I should like to be married in church to you, Dal." He looked up at her now with a sudden gleam lighting his eyes, as if some coincidence had struck him. He met

her eyes looking at him so full of love, trust, and tenderness that they seemed to do even more than speak, to look right out of her heart into his. But they did not; they misinterpreted his expression. Margery hastened to add, in a faltering voice, "When I thought of marrying Lord Talboys, I said it must be in a Registrar's office. But I don't believe I ever did think of it now. That time all seems so long ago now, as if it had never been. Being with you has blotted everything else out of my mind, all the badness and falseness of the past. If it could only be so in the future, then—then I might perhaps some day be worthy to be—your wife." Her voice faltered again over the last words caressingly, as if she did not like to let them go.

"Do you think being with you will ever make me really good, Dal?"

"My dear child!" cried he, and stretched

his hand across the table, and took hold of hers and pressed it. His heart was too full for utterance. He was a man who had had an ideal, and that he had fallen short of it, had not led to his altogether forgetting it. But he felt now that Margery believed him to be even at this moment higher than the ideal he had fallen short of. The feeling choked him. As life goes on, circumstances arrange themselves in many unforeseen ways. If four years ago, when Dalrymple had first thought of becoming an artist, he had been told that he should in so short a time attain even so much celebrity as he had attained, and be beloved, worshipped indeed by the most beautiful, most loveable woman it had ever been his fortune to encounter, or even to imagine, he would have said there was nothing further to be wished, and in such perfect happiness hardly anything to be feared. Yet I think, in all the world, there was hardly a more

miserable man than Dalrymple Bruce at that moment. For he loved Margery with an unselfish love, as well as with that selfish love that is so far more common. After a moment or two he spoke, and the common-place, practical sort of words gave no idea of the tumult of emotions that had been surging through him.

"If being with me ever makes you one whit different from what you are now, Madge, it will be a pity for me, and for you too, my queen. But you see there are difficulties about being married. You must not be in too great a hurry."

"Yes, Dal," said Margery, meekly. "Of course you know best. And it is not as if we doubted one another—did not trust each other perfectly." The smile with which she uttered these last words might have almost maddened a man who did not love her. And it need hardly be said how musical were the full rich tones in which she

spoke. Some singers do not speak well, but Margery spoke, as she sang, with a full rich voice, perfectly under control. Dalrymple looked at her as if he could not leave off looking. At last he said, with a deep sigh—

"Poor Stapleton! I have pitied him before, but never as I do now."

"Oh, don't, Dal. Don't," cried Margery, in a voice of intense pain. "He—he—he is too good to speak of," she said at last, strangling her tears.

"Is he?" said Dalrymple, looking at her tenderly, but watchfully. "Yes, he would have given himself to be burnt for your sake, if it could make you happy. He will regret nothing now, if only you are happy —if only!"

"There is no doubt about that, Dal, is there?" said Margery, looking up at him like a trustful, loving child. "We may be poor, and ill, and what the world calls un-

fortunate, but when we have once seen clearly that love is the highest thing, then —then—" and Margery waved her hand, as if to signify that then all other things became very small and petty. "And you will never leave off loving me, I know, Dal. Even if I did anything wrong, you would love me always, would you not, Dal?"

"Even if you did anything," said he, gently.

Then the breakfast came, and, as they ate and drank, gradually Dalrymple's spirits seemed to rise, and before they left the restaurant he had said lightly to Margery—

"And since there are so many obstacles, and it may take some time before we are married, it would be better to go to some place where I am not known, lest people should remark on our being together. Should you mind leaving Florence? Here I have so many acquaintances, who might make remarks."

Margery thought he had observed how one or two moustachioed, dark-eyed Italians had lounged carelessly past the entrance into the little, painted boudoir, where they sat, staring in as they did so, and then a few minutes afterwards had apparently equally carelessly lounged back again. How well she knew the kind of thing! She had seen it so often in the old days, when she had been wont to go to cafés and restaurants with her father, and handsome Dick Travers had glowered over his shoulder, and taken note whether the men who stared at his daughter looked as if they had money to lose at play, or not! How proud and indifferent Margery had looked in those days, bearing the admiring stare unflinchingly! Now she blushed and trembled under it, for was she not Dalrymple's, and did not she know what love meant? No other man had a right to look at her now.

So she answered readily enough, "Yes, it would be better to go away, where you are not known, where people might think you were—my brother."

"Or your husband!" said Dalrymple, with a smile, drawing her arm through his, as they walked away together. "My Madge, you are very good to trust me so far! Does it ever occur to you that some men might abuse such confidence!"

"Most men, perhaps," said Margery, gravely. "But not you, Dal."

She had felt the binding nature of absolute trust herself, was it of intention that she was laying the burden she had herself found so intolerable upon Dalrymple? Anyhow, he felt it, and the dignified courtesy with which he treated her was very different from his half caressing, half insolent familiarity at the Priory. Margery felt the difference at once when she sat to him in his studio, for it had been set-

tled, that she was to spend the time remaining in Florence chiefly sitting for her picture. Dalrymple could not leave quite at once, for he had a commission from a German Grand Duke, which he must execute first. The studio was very differently arranged now from the day when Margery first saw it, and she did not inquire about the picture for the Grand Duke, for she thought it might be one of those that now stood with their faces to the wall, and she did not wish again to see any of those that had first struck her unpleasantly. She trusted Dalrymple, and she would not for the world have advised him what to paint, and what not, but she felt that there were some subjects she did not like to see treated by her lover, and Dalrymple knew instinctively that it was so.

There was nothing to object to in the studio now. But Margery felt at once the difference in Dalrymple's manner towards

herself. He did not any longer come forward now, and place her hand where he wished it to be, much less try to place her head himself in the proper pose, as he had once done at the Priory. He told her what attitude he wished her to assume, and he stood patiently watching till she had caught it, but he held out no finger himself to assist her.

"Where do you think we had better go to?" she asked, after a little while.

Dalrymple looked up at her with that enthusiastic light in his eyes that Margery so loved to see there.

"My queen has but to order, and I obey," said he.

"No—no, that is not right. I have to obey you," said Margery.

There is always a charm in seeing the mighty lay aside their power, but to the artist it was irresistible when the beauty who looked made to be worshipped, and

have men sue for a glance, thus humbled herself like any village maiden, and lavished upon him all her sweetest looks and words without so much as his asking. His eyes expressed how irresistible he found her, as he paused in his painting and looked up.

"Madge," said he, "have you thought, when we are married, what you mean to do? Do you wish to—mean to sing?"

"It would be a delight to me!" said she, her eyes kindling.

"Of course it would," cried the artist, throwing aside brush and palette, and standing before her with folded arms, lost in admiration. "Of course it would, like any other beautiful and perfect thing. Oh, Madge—Madge, what a glorious creature you are! You do everything perfectly—speak, move, sing, breathe. And it is all a delight to you, because you can do it so perfectly. But I am glad you wish to

sing. I see nothing in life unless it is the complete exercise and development of every God-given faculty, and to me it would seem a sin and a shame ever to hide such gifts as yours from the multitude. Why should not all the world be the better for the knowledge of how glorious a creature a truly beautiful woman is? A woman who is beautiful through no fashionable artifice, but fresh from her Maker's hands! No one could look at you, as you are now, and not be the better for doing so—not feel braced to fresh effort. I could fancy even," added he, coming down to playfulness now, "I could fancy a whole host of women seeing you, and washing off their paint, and laying aside their false hair, and giving up all attempt at a beauty with which they have not been gifted, and becoming natural and therefore charming again. When with your beauty your voice is coupled, I feel that, were I fifty times

your husband, I should have no right to shut up such great gifts for my own selfish enjoyment, and that I put in the only possible claim I could have to them by my wish that everyone else should be elevated by some participation in them. I know," added he, "that as a singer you will win fame, as another woman plucks a flower, and that I, after all my toil to be an artist, can only hope to go through life as the great singer's husband, my own laurels quite cast into the shade and overgrown by yours. But what of that? All the love of Art that lives in me cries out—Let the highest Art come to light, let the great singer become known, even though you should never paint again! What are whole academies of artists in comparison with one Raphael? And there are Raphaels in song too."

Margery's chest heaved, her eyes dilated, her cheeks glowed. She forgot attitude

and everything, as she came forward and, placing her hands on his shoulders, looked up into his face, and then, as in an excess of love, rested her head upon his bosom. Dalrymple bent and kissed the curving red lips, and as she kissed him, she whispered,

"And if I ever am great, it will be you who have made me so, you who have inspired me, you who first made me wish to be a great singer, you who enable me to be so now. And when my voice rings out through the great theatre, it will be your love, and my joy in it, that will be all the melody. The world may not know it, but God, and you and I, we shall know that it is you who are the great musician, I shall be only the instrument—and such a happy one," she murmured.

That day Dalrymple did not paint much more. They were touching heaven with their fingers, as the sweet Italian saying has it. When Margery had talked to

Allan, she had always felt as if she must utter easy things to understand, or he would not comprehend her. Besides—true woman!—she loved best to listen. And now she could listen, while Dalrymple talked as he had never talked before, for never before had he found such a listener. Some people inspire others. Margery inspired him. He was a different man from what he had ever been before, for that one day he was what he and some others had sometimes thought he might have been. And yet every now and then, like a cold, poisonous Cobra Capello tightening its irresistible folds around him, and at every tightening drawing nearer with its venom that must poison all, came the consciousness that never as on this day had he been so near being a villain.

There is perhaps some danger that the reader may have gathered the impression that this figure painter had lived a worse

life than he really had, because more than once severe expressions have been used with regard to his past, and the harsh things he himself said of it have been repeated. But what is a bad life for one man would be good for another. Dalrymple's had certainly been bad, because it had always been consciously lower than his ideal, always consciously deficient in effort after his ideal. Because he had again, and again, and again entertained lower thoughts, spoken lower words, done sometimes even lower acts, than he was the whole time morally convinced he would have been capable of, had he tried his best to resist temptation. Yet so far, his life would have been a beautiful life for some men whom the world yet esteems, just as his pictures would have been triumphs for an amateur.

It all depends on your scale of comparison what adjective you attach to a life or a picture. Look at that sketch on a chance

friend's block that you meet in Switzerland, and words can hardly express your admiration. You talk about it to everyone you come across for a long time, "The sketch you saw an artist making on the Lake of Thun. The loveliest little thing!" and so on. Come on it in a London exhibition, and you say, "Ha! hem! On the Lake of Thun. Oh, very nicely done! Not quite true to nature though. I don't think I should have recognised it."

And yet Dalrymple had sinned cruelly, and his sin was finding him out. Only he had done it so carelessly, so entirely without thought of doing wrong, and circumstances had made it so easy, those circumstances for which you and I, reader, are as responsible as he.

CHAPTER IV.

MARRIED IN CHURCH.

MARGERY had been used from her earliest days to consider economy, to her it was a matter of course to go out to a café, and breakfast there for a quarter of the price which she would have paid in the hotel at which she was staying. But though for economy's sake she went to one of the cheapest and simplest cafés in the neighbourhood, a little café somewhat frequented by artists in the evening, but generally almost empty when she went there, it was with care, almost coquetry, that before going she knotted a coloured handkerchief round her

throat, and stuck a bunch of violets in her dress, for after breakfast she was to meet Dalrymple. He had all but finished the picture for the Grand Duke the night before, and to-day he was to come quite early, and take her to the Pitti, which she had not visited this time, and then they were to have a *déjeuner à la fourchette* in that same restaurant where they had eaten together the first day of her happiness, and after that she was to go back with him to his Studio, and sit to him for the last time in Florence. Next day they were to start together for Bologna, and Margery was to get an engagement at the Opera-house, and Dalrymple was to establish a Studio, and they were to be married as soon as possible, and lead an idyllic life together.

"Then I shall have ceased to be a Travers, so an idyllic life will be possible for me," Margery had said the evening before.

And Dalrymple had answered caressingly,

"Were you ever a Travers? I believe you always took more after your mother. You have her beauty, and her voice, and her simple trustful—"

"Peasant nature?" asked Margery, fondly. She always liked better to speak of her mother as a peasant than a singer, though she meant to be a singer herself. Dalrymple had started as she had spoken. He had for a moment flung aside the hand that was resting so confidingly on his arm. "What is it?" Margery had asked.

"Oh, nothing! These stones are so confoundedly sharp. I believe they have cut a hole in my boot," and the artist stooped, and looked down anxiously, as if he believed himself. It was so rare for him to use anything approaching to bad language, that Margery felt as much confused as if he had sworn at her. But the stones of Florence are very sharp sometimes, and she had forgotten all about it this morning,

as she knotted her handkerchief and stuck in her violets, and went out to drink a hurried cup of coffee and return to meet Dalrymple. She sat down rather behind the door of the little café, and was the more glad she had done so, as two rather rough-looking artists sauntered in a few minutes afterwards. She knew Dalrymple did not care about her being recognised, and now of course they did not even see her, as she leant back in her corner, whilst the two men talked together, one a Florentine, one by his accent apparently a German.

"Where is Mariuccia?" asked the latter. "I want her for my picture."

"A good many people have wanted Mariuccia," laughed the other. "Yours is not the only picture in the world."

"But where is she?" asked the German, somewhat peevishly.

"*Maritata nella chiesa!*" replied the Ital-

ian. "If you had met the pretty child you would have heard all about it; she is as proud of it as a baby of red shoes. And truly she well may be, for it is not every day a model gets married in Church. But of course it is a ceremony, nothing more; she is not married really. However, *il marito*, as she calls him, won't let her sit to anyone else now.

"The villain!" said the German. "But who is it? Not *il Dallèe* surely? Yet I remember he had some wild ideas when I was last in Florence. How did he get a priest too? For of course it is not legal, he an Englishman and a Protestant."

"Ah—h!" said the Italian, shrugging his shoulders. "Money can do a good deal. And nobody asked any questions. Why should they? However, we may hope to have the Mariuccia back among us once more, for now there's the most beautiful Princess come from England to claim

il Dallèe, and they're to be really married this time, of course. So he can't keep both —models."

"What! that *bella superba* I saw with him the other day. The lucky fellow!" cried the German.

"Yes, lucky enough," said the Italian. "But I'd rather have the Mariuccia, if it were I. She has got ways and looks. A man may paint her a hundred times, and call them different pictures. This Principessa must be the Principessa always; besides, she is too proud. I wonder what she would say to Mariuccia now. That picture *il Dallèe* is painting of her for the Grand Duke is his *capo d'opera* they say. The child is prettier than the mother even, and yet as like *il Dallèe* as—"

Still talking, the two men sauntered away, having thrown down their money rather noisily. The noise startled Margery a little, she stretched out her hand

uneasily, and clutched at the window sill, then gradually her arm dropped flaccid at her side again, and she sat motionless as before, her eyes fixed on a peg in the wall opposite, the pupils distended, as if she were seeing visions. She was seeing visions—visions of what might have been, and what would be. When she had learned the truth she did not know, but she had learnt it now, understood it, understood so many things that had puzzled her before. She was not angry, not sorry for herself, only astonished, as if the world had fallen to pieces around her, and sorry, oh! so sorry for Dalrymple, the man she had loved utterly, put on a pedestal above other men. He might have stood upon it, she thought, might have remained there for ever, happy and noble, but now—now! And to think that she herself had in a measure contributed to his lowering day by day, for that must be the end of it, Margery thought.

Fancy a race-horse harnessed with a pretty pony! Fancy Dalrymple married, according to the Church, but not according to the law, to a Florentine model! And what must he have been feeling all this time! What violence to his nobler nature must he not have done already! Margery realised now how many times he had been on the point of telling her all, and had yet desisted, and said nothing, till at last, carried away by her beauty or her love, she knew not which, he had broken out into protestations all the more tender because of the great sin against her which they sought to cover, and of which he was conscious, though she was not.

"Poor Dal! Poor Dal!" she murmured at last. Then the murmur awoke her from her reverie, and like a lightning flash, scathing all as it passed, there flitted through her soul the thought—"Poor Margery!" and with the thought came the

recollection of his voice, the very tone in which he sometimes said—"Poor Madge! poor Madge!" No one else called her Madge now, only her father had done so, and Lord Talboys out of impertinence, and Dalrymple kept up the habit. "Poor Madge! Poor Madge!"

Margery covered her face with her hands, and for a few moments her bosom shook with suppressed sobs. What would life be to her without Dalrymple? At one time she had thought it would be happiness to make Allan happy, that good Allan, who had always been good, and true, and loving towards her; who had loved and respected her when no one else had; who loved and respected her still. Margery knew he did, she could have believed almost anything of herself, but she could never give up her belief in Allan's love and respect for her. He would always trust her, however appearances might be against her. Her tears

flowed at the thought. But then they stopped, while, with a sharp pain at her heart, she recalled how she had taken leave of that idea of being happy with the reflected light of Allan's happiness by doing all that lay in her power to annihilate his happiness for ever, to crush out all faith from him in things or people.

Then her mind flitted to other things, and it recurred to her how at one time she had thought there might be happiness in being a great singer, whose name should be in all men's mouths, whose songs should be feebly sung after her, who should tighten and relax the heart-strings of all those whose purses allowed of their hearing her. But had she ever thought that? Had there not always been lurking in her mind that thus, and thus alone, Dalrymple would be sure to hear of her, to rejoice in her triumphs, and be stimulated himself to new

endeavours? Did she wish him to hear of her now? Would it encourage him that she should succeed? Would it not crush him altogether, or drive him to desperate expedients to drown all memory of her? "Dalrymple! Dal!" she moaned. The tears were wet upon her fingers. She moved uneasily, and looked up. Everything looked so different from what it had appeared when she entered that morning. The little café seemed so miserable a place, the waiter even looked brazen-faced and cold-hearted. She could fancy him cheating his own mother out of her last soldo, and letting her die of starvation in consequence. The very sunshine seemed to have a sneer in its clear brilliance. She had thought it a bright day when she came out in the morning, now it seemed pitiless, and the wind felt keen—she could feel it even inside the café. Yet perhaps after all it was not true, was all a lie, an

invention, a fantasy. No! Margery felt that what she had heard was true. That alone explained Dalrymple's manner when she had arrived in Florence, his never asking her to flee with him from the Priory, his desire now to leave Florence. Yet she would not condemn him quite unheard, she would have testimony, only not his own. She could not see him again, look him in the face and say—"Did you, Dalrymple Bruce, married to another woman, yet intend marrying me?" Margery moaned again. The idea of seeing him was too much for her. His face, his voice, his well-known gestures, and familiar tricks of manner all returned to her, so often rejoiced in, so well beloved, yet never to be rejoiced in again. "Never! never! I could bear anything but that, O God! and for him too it is best. Let him carry away with him the recollection of me as he last saw me, not as now. Wrecked, Over the pre-

cipice, in the abyss beneath. Oh, God! can one be meant to live, when there is nothing left to live for? Nothing! Nothing!"

Unconsciously she was speaking aloud, and the waiter came to know if she wanted anything. Mechanically Margery took out her purse and paid him. She waited for her change, and counted it all mechanically, yet with a slight feeling of astonishment at herself that it should be so, that she should still pay money and count change in this new world that was so very strange to her, this world in which Dalrymple was not. Then she gathered herself up, and went forth to the Studio—to the Studio where she had spent such happy hours with her lover. She knew he would not be there now, he would be waiting about for her, wondering why she did not come down to join him, asking for her perhaps—wondering. She could not walk, but she got into a little carriage, and drove

up to the Studio. She thought she knew where to find the key, and Dalrymple would not be there. She would see the picture for the Grand Duke, the face with looks and ways, she would see——

Margery shivered, and would have drawn a shawl around her, yet the sun was shining brightly. She longed for a shawl, for a cushion to rest her head upon, for Allan's shoulder, for his kindly voice, for his honest blue eyes looking lovingly into hers. "He would have shielded me from all this," she said, and sighed. She wanted Allan just as she wanted a cushion and shawl, for her own comfort, to ease her of her pain, not for any good that she might do him!

Then the carriage stopped, she was at the door of the Studio, and moaning and shivering, Margery gathered herself up, and went slowly up the great dark staircase, the key of Dalrymple's Studio in her hand. She knocked, just to make sure he

was not there, then she put the key into the lock. The key turned, the door opened, and there it was, in the middle of the Studio, the picture of the girl with ways and looks—Dalrymple's *chef-d'œuvre.* Margery saw that at once. How carefully it was painted, with what loving touches, unlike altogether the flowery fanciful style, untrue to nature, in which he had painted Miss Spluck! How winning a face this was! With what arch eyes the young mother looked out of the canvas, glancing away from her baby so as yet more to fascinate the beholder, asking, as it were—"Is he not beautiful, my child?" but asking it so winningly it was impossible almost to look at the child.

She was as unlike a common Italian model as possible, no severe regularity about her features, but rather a semblance of a dimple in the delicate cheek! She was in peasant costume, and the white handkerchief folded square over her head,

and the white chemise, rounding out yet only half concealing the brown, exquisitely moulded neck, perfectly shone in the fresh paints. There were coral ear-rings, and a coral necklace, and eyes that smiled *lampeggiando*, as only Italian eyes can smile, but the thing that fascinated Margery was the mouth, that looked as if it had just been kissed, and must be kissed quickly again, lest it should melt away for very sweetness!

Margery stood in front of the picture, looking at it. If she could have seen herself, she would have known that it was as if that picture had turned her to stone. All the severity of her face had come out now, and Margery's face was of the severest style of beauty till she smiled, and the tender mouth became visible. There was no smile about her lips now, they were pressed tight together, and her face was perfectly awful in its beauty and its desolation.

A door opened, and there in the doorway stood the original of the picture, a peasant girl with a baby in her arms. Mariuccia, after sitting for her picture, had been allowed to wait at the Studio till her aunt, who had gone to do some marketing in the town, could take her home. Dalrymple had never liked that she should walk alone. She had taken leave of him that day with many tears, having heard that he was again leaving Florence for some time.

Now she had heard the noise in the Studio, and half hoped that it was he who had returned. Instead of him she saw the beautiful lady whose pictures she knew well in the Studio. She was frightened, and dared not close the door again, but stood peeping like a timid child. But Margery was not looking at her now, she had caught sight of the baby, Dalrymple's child, with his father's eyes, and she walked across,

and caught the child in her arms, and pressed hot kisses on the baby's face. The child was a merry, good-humoured child, and stretched out dimpled arms, and crowed with pleasure. It was as if Dalrymple's glowing eyes were looking back into her own delighted. How often she had seen them do so! But never, never again!

Yet Margery softened, and began to break down, as she saw them. She laid her cheek against the soft baby cheek, and with the soft baby fingers brushed half the sternness out of her own face. Then she handed back the child to the startled mother.

"Tell him I was here," she said, "and saw you, and kissed his baby—and went away." Her voice made even herself shudder, there was something sepulchral about it that told of hopes that were dead, and joys for ever buried. "He will not be angry with you?" she asked, with a sort of

afterthought, her large grey eyes, so full of thought and feeling, gazing wistfully for a moment into the uneducated, untried eyes before her, that seemed to have known nothing yet but love and sunshine, sweet figs, and pretty coral beads.

"*E troppo buono*," said Mariuccia, her speaking face at once illuminated by such a smile as made the whole room look brighter, but only sadder and more heartless to Margery. "He is never angry, *il Dallèe*. But the beautiful Signorina will come back to sit for her picture."

"No, I shall never come back," said Margery, and shuddered, as Mariuccia went forward and turned, with its face to the light, the picture the artist had said he called Wrecked. "Leave it there. Leave it like that," she said, hoarsely, and was going away. Suddenly she turned, and stood before the beautiful model. "You are married?" she asked. She could not

part with all belief in Dalrymple at once, and yet she feared that, as the days passed by, the long interminable days that she might yet have to live through, uncheered by any sight of him, embittered by his recollection, she feared that doubts might suggest themselves, and she might be tempted to believe anything.

"*Si! nella Chiesa*," said Mariuccia, with that air of intense delight that, as the Florentine had said, recalled a baby's pleasure in red shoes. "See my ring! Ah, *bambino mio*, let me show my ring to the lady. Is he not beautiful?" she asked. "And just like his father. He will be an angel too, when he is a man, and a celebrated painter."

Whilst the long drawn-out Italian vowels were still cooing round the room "pittore rinomato," whilst she was still coaxing the baby to let her show her ring, Margery was down the long dark staircase, out in

the morning freshness and brightness again. The light blue shades were by their magic transforming the uplands round Florence into the distant hills of familiar allegory. Florence was lying stretched out before her in the sunshine, with a great hum of buying and selling, broken by a clang of church bells. A priest walked by reading his breviary, and a young man was whispering to a dark-eyed girl at the half open door of a neighbouring Cortile. Margery looked at it all as if she had never seen it before, gazed with staring eyes that saw nothing, her chest heaving, and the colour coming and going in her cheek, it would be hard to say whether in anger or grief. An Italian officer lounged by. "Bella! bella!" he murmured, and looked back at her over his shoulder, and smiled at her through his long moustache with easy insolence. A sculptor came to the door of his Studio, and looked at her still more impertinently, his

eyes taking in every detail, gloating over them, treasuring them up in his memory, and delighting in them.

Margery saw them both, noticed their stares, heard the murmured "Bella! bella!" but heeded nothing, comprehended nothing, looked out at the world, which had been a Paradise only that morning, only a few short hours ago; that looked still so fair, and yet was so miserable, so wholly destitute of happiness, so overflowingly full of pain.

Then from a window hard by floated out the sounds of a piano, and a woman's voice singing—

"Il dolce suono
Mi colpì di sua voce."

Margery waited to hear no more. She was awake now, she understood, she remembered. She put her hands to her ears, and ran down the steep descent into Florence.

"Allan! Allan!" she cried, "Allan!"

It was like a child calling for its mother, like a man crying out for his friend, like anything but a woman calling for the lover she had most heartlessly jilted. But Margery had had no mother, and no friend but Allan. She felt sure he must still be her friend, because she had never been more than a friend to him. But Allan had been her lover.

CHAPTER V.

DALRYMPLE BRUCE.

I HEARD a story of a little boy the other day. There was a ladder put against the drawing-room wall, and he was told not to climb up it. Presently he came to his mother.

"Mother darling, please take that ladder away. For if it stays there, Charlie will have to be a naughty boy."

Unfortunately in life our temptations are not all so easily removable as that ladder, and sometimes we forget to ask that they should be. Dalrymple had done what he could once. He had left Margery and the Priory, and he had fancied himself doing

something grand and heroic in so doing, not simply his duty, what was absolutely demanded of him. He had actually gone so far as to fancy himself making a sacrifice to, I know not what, but I believe at times he persuaded himself it was out of regard for Margery herself. And so he indemnified himself beforehand, and whispered his love to her, while she lay helpless in his arms by what he was tempted to consider a happy accident. Then he had gone away, fancying himself the most miserable and ill-used of men, an object of compassion for all the world. And truly so he was, but by whose doing but his own? He had gone in for Quixotic ideas, and delighted to *pose* before the artist world of Florence as a man who had not the commonly received notions as to religion and morality, did not think it necessary to go to Church of a Sunday, nor in any way to act as other people

who sought to lead a right life, but who in some respects had high, abstract ideas, that put to the blush all such common-place notions of common-place men and women. He had seen Mariuccia, and found her very lovely. She had had a fancy to be married in Church, though truly she would have seen little sin, poor ignorant pretty little model! in dispensing with the ceremony, which was to her just a ceremony, nothing more, of no more importance than a wedding dress. But she had had a fancy to be married in Church, just as she might have had a fancy for new corals, and Dalrymple had gratified her, and married her in Church. He knew perfectly well the marriage was not legal, he being a Protestant, she a Roman Catholic; he an Englishman, she a Florentine. But of what use to talk to her about that? She would not have understood, and it left him the freer. Besides, now certainly no shadow of sin could

rest upon her conscience with regard to her connexion with himself. Dalrymple felt as if he had shielded her at his own expense, and posed more than ever as heroic. But he did not wish to marry anyone else; and so, as yet, after marriage he still found Mariuccia the loveliest woman he had ever seen, and the artist's creed was that there was nothing else to be wished for in a woman but loveliness, with a good dash of love to sweeten it certainly, but that also he found in Mariuccia.

Yet as the days went on, despite his own theories, he found there was something else, of which he had little thought before, and that was womanly purity. Mariuccia was as ignorant a little model as ever danced a Tarantella; she had as little mind, poor child, as probably ever angel-faced woman was blest with; but for all that this ignorant, untaught child, who knew nothing of life but its postures, had the true

woman soul fresh from heaven. She did many things that might strike the passer-by as questionable, for had she not all her life been learning the arts with which models fascinate painters, and sucked them in with her mother's milk, who had inherited them from her mother? For Mariuccia came of a long ancestry of models.

Just passing by, you might have seen much to blame, you required to live with her to know how pure and innocent a creature she was. Dalrymple lived with her, and he discovered it. He had thought her pure and innocent when he went to Church with her, but a month after that he began to have a sort of awe before the pretty little thing he had first called his wife half in joke. Yet she wearied him sometimes with her caresses. Perhaps he would have loved her better had they been less tender, less unvarying. Yet he would not have let her guess this for the world,

the thought of paining her was pain to him, the idea of profaning the temple of her heart by debasing the image she had placed there of himself seemed like profanity. Yet living up to it was like living up to any other code of principles, galling to Dalrymple, and he was very weary of her caresses.

A trip to England might benefit his career as a painter, so he went and left her. Mariuccia cried bitterly, but he told her it was for his good, and when she had understood that it was for his happiness, that was all her idea of good, poor child! she laid her head on his shoulder and held his hand tight in hers, kissed him several times sadly, but patiently, then went away with her aunt into the country. Dalrymple would not leave her in Florence while he was away, and she had no mother, poor child! He had never asked her why she had looked so pale of late, and she had not

the courage to tell him now that he was going away.

So Dalrymple went to England and took his place at once as the fashionable portrait painter of the season, and was much run after, and enjoyed it all the more that he had known the *revers* of the shield. And for the most part he forgot Mariuccia. Sometimes he thought of her, however, and compared fashionable London ladies with her, to the disadvantage of the former. When he flirted with Miss Spluck, for instance, of whose dancing *abandon* was the principal characteristic; while her light curls floated into his face, he thought of Mariuccia, and thanked God she was quite different, a jewel with whom Lottie would not bear comparison in his eyes, but a jewel that he preferred to keep locked up at a distance. In fact, what jewel does a man like to wear round his neck in these days? And it was there that Mariuccia's

clinging arms would have been, had he then been by her side. Dalrymple was thankful that he was not, but he was also thankful that she was not like Miss Spluck, with whom, in the meantime, he enjoyed a flirtation to his heart's content.

"Oh, how I like a fascinating lover, who means *nothing!*" said Lottie, sometimes. Dalrymple most evidently meant nothing, and he danced perfectly. Lottie flirted with him, in the intervals between something more serious with Allan. And it was settled that she should go to the Priory, and that Dalrymple should come there to paint her picture. Then he met Margery again, and if that temptation had been as easily removeable as the ladder; if Margery had gone away, or Dalrymple had been free to do so; if Allan had never left him alone with her, or if he had not made her love him, then perhaps Dalrymple would have escaped scot free. He

would have gone away back to Mariuccia thought himself a hero for his constancy, more or less tried to live up to her ideal, more or less failed, thought of Margery now and then. Nothing more! But as it was, he never asked to have his temptation taken away, and yet felt, as the child said, "If it stays, Charlie will have to be a naughty boy." He had met Margery years before, he had remembered her ever since. Why! he had painted her picture from memory chiefly, and won his first entrance into the Temple of Fame, or the Labour Market, as we may rather word it now-a-days, by means of it. He had watched for her name in the papers as a great singer, or a great actress. What her choice would be he had never felt quite sure, but he had felt certain that she would achieve distinction, whichever it might be, and he had begged her to become a singer, if by any means it should

be possible. So he had watched for her name, and thought of her, as he had seen her, young, beautiful, proud, and very scornful, the first woman he had ever met, who had seemed to him to wear celebrity upon her brow, and to disdain it, even before she stooped to pick her laurels. Many people despise them afterwards, when they are theirs, but Margery despised them beforehand, as by intuition, knowing how valueless was popular applause, how wilted the crowns must be, that should lie first on the floor of a stage, before they should ever reach her hand.

But when Dalrymple met her again he found her no longer so hard and scornful. Misfortune had softened her, and Allan had awakened in her the woman's heart. When she looked at her lover her eyes melted, and her lips parted with an unutterable tenderness, whilst Dalrymple felt himself cut to the heart by jealousy and

indignation. That a grand, noble creature like that should be matched to a clown was a thing to make a man's blood boil! And that she should know it, feel him so far below her, and yet stoop from her high estate, and consecrate all her beauty, and mind, and wonderful gift of song, all to make him pleasure whom, as Dalrymple thought, a mess of porridge might have pleased as well! That was surely enough to make the heart of any man with an artist soul run over with pity. Dalrymple fumed, and grieved, was impetuous, and then repented his own imprudence; gradually discovered that hers was the nature formed to go with his, that in her presence he could never tire, that talking to her he was himself, but himself at his highest. Then he thought of Mariuccia, and groaned. "Too late! too late!" he said. "Yes, too late for himself, but surely not too late to save Margery. Let her become a *prima*

donna, and live for Art, if not for him! Let her at least marry Lord Talboys."

Perhaps after all it was nothing but jealousy, and because he felt that she could never love Art, never Lord Talboys, as she loved himself, as she might yet perhaps one day love Allan. Then, when it was too late, when the mischief was done, and he had taught Margery to give him all her heart, and told her he had given her all his, he went away, and busied himself in London with Lottie's affairs, and Harry Yorke's, and fancied himself doing something noble, and unlike other men, and felt very sick at heart, and began to long for Mariuccia. Even her caresses would be better than none; and after all, was he so sure of them? Might not some other man have been busy about her, as he himself had been about Margery? Not that he believed that Mariuccia could ever falter in her constancy, but she

was very helpless, and ignorant, and exposed to dangers such as could never befall Margery, and, after all, the world was very evil. So Dalrymple hurried through everything, and broke some engagements, postponed others, and started for Florence, and found Mariuccia with a beautiful baby boy that looked into his face with eyes that glowed like his own. Dalrymple was a man to be very much impressed with the idea of having a child. The little helpless creature, that somehow owed its life to his, seemed a great responsibility for him to be entrusted with, and the sight of his child sobered him at once. All the good latent in him was called out; he thought regretfully, for his child's sake now, that he was not married to Mariuccia, and wished himself a better man, that he might be more helpful to that baby. Besides, the boy was very lovely, a model child, just as Mariuccia was now

become a model mother. That was an additional attraction in Dalrymple's eyes.

The hereditary Prince, who had once been in love with Margery, and who had succeeded to his father's Dukedom since then, had never quite forgotten her, seeing he had bought her picture at once, when he had come across it at the Exhibition. He had never lost sight of Dalrymple Bruce as an artist since then, having an affection for his style, begotten of his long ago worn out passion for Margery, and had requested him now to paint a picture of an Italian mother and child, that should, if possible, not recall too forcibly a Holy Family. Naturally, Dalrymple painted his own wife and child; he could not have found better models, if he had searched all Florence through, and all the other artists were crying out against him that he would not let Mariuccia sit to any of them, since he had married her in

Church. Much sense there was in such a marriage, they said. They were all very hard upon him, saying, what was true, that his marriage was illegal, and his child illegitimate; but Mariuccia would not have understood it, if they had told her so, and Dalrymple himself, of course, knew it perfectly, and was a little sore about it. He had not much cared as long as it had been only Mariuccia herself, though sometimes even then, as he had learnt more to appreciate her simple goodness, he had felt uncomfortable, thinking that he, of all men, had deceived her, cheated her by a mock marriage. But now that there was a child, Dalrymple was unhappy about it, and tenderer towards the boy, who, through his fault, would never all through his life be able to boast of his father, as other boys boast sometimes, the children of honest fathers, whose names they can avow without blushing.

Dalrymple thought now that, if he had known about this baby, he would have really married Mariuccia first; he had an injured feeling for the boy, whom the world would look down upon because of his fault. And he thought he could not be more cut off from Margery, if he were Mariuccia's husband. Margery was going to marry Lord Talboys, to sell herself for place and pelf, as any, the worst woman that walked the streets, might do; and he, being mock married to Mariuccia, had been the first to insult her in her degradation, and kiss her, and whisper love, and come away and leave her.

Dalrymple was even hard upon himself in these days, and very tender to Mariuccia and his child. He painted more assiduously than he had ever done before, and the result was that brother artists pronounced his picture for the Grand Duke his *capo d'opera*, and that Mariuccia and

the child were happy, one as childishly so as the other. Then one day some one knocked at the door, and Dalrymple, presaging nothing, with his brush and palette in his hand, and Mariuccia, posing in the attitude of happy wife and mother, went to the door, and opened, and saw Margery! Lo! his temptation had come all the way to Florence to seek him out, and it had grown irresistible. For Margery was so humble, and so timid—she had given up everything for love of him, she had given herself so completely over to him, she trusted him so utterly, and, above all, she was so loveable. She understood him so perfectly, followed every turn of his mind, entered so completely into his weaknesses and his aspirations, was so conscious where he failed, and yet loved him through everything with that strong love of an ardent, passionate nature. Dalrymple's temptation had been yielded to, and now, in the way

in which it sought him out, he knew no longer how to flee from it. Yet to tell Margery the simple truth would have been to end all at once and for ever the struggle of conscience, the degradation, the deceit, and that Dalrymple knew, and shrank from her hearing it. At times he gave himself up to a wild, passionate delight in her and her love, at others he abased himself before her, and, grave and very sad at heart, did reverence before her as to a goddess from heaven, knowing that he was betraying her to the undoing of her whole life. For should Margery learn the truth, even after she was his wedded wife, Dalrymple believed that she would leave him. And then she would go upon the stage, like so many singers, a woman separated from her husband, why, people did not quite know, a woman with a history, and an unhappy one, consequently a woman to be lightly spoken of by the many, and with no home

in which to find a shelter; only that story in the background how He had been an artist, and there had been a Model, and so that was the result, that beautiful Singer with the outraged look upon her face, and the tremble in her voice. What a career for Margery, a woman who had never known what home was, and who might have made such a happy home for the man she loved, and rejoiced in it so womanly! Dalrymple cursed himself as he thought of it. And *perhaps—perhaps* she might never learn the truth, might pass through life in ignorance of it, never knowing of Mariuccia and the cruel wrong done her, nor of the baby boy, so unjustly born into the world with a stigma attaching to him from his cradle. Dalrymple almost sobbed as he thought of it, yet he told himself he could not say to Margery—"Go! I have no need for you,—do not want you. Earn your bread by singing,

or as you will. But go, in Heaven's name. I have a wife already, or if she is not my wife I have at least a child." Yet nothing short of that would have answered his purpose thoroughly.

In the meantime, he delayed from day to day, and sometimes touched heaven with his fingers, and sometimes writhed in hell; and this day he had told Mariuccia that he was leaving Florence again for a little while, and that she must continue living with her aunt, and be very good, and take care of herself and the child while he was away. He had said it all very hurriedly, and as if he were only going for a week or so, and Mariuccia had held up his baby to kiss him, and been more intent about bringing the baby's arms about his throat, than placing her own there; and Dalrymple had laughed at her ineffectual efforts, as the child would stretch out his little arms and clutch at his hair, or do anything else

but embrace him as she wished. But he had been very white as he laughed. Then he had put the child down, and there were tears in his eyes as he said,

"*Mariuccia mia*, forgive me if I have ever caused you pain or grief."

"*Dio mio!*" cried she. "What have you ever given me but joy? *Marito mio!*" and then she had put up her face to be kissed, and Dalrymple had gone away white as death, and shuddering at her words. He had not recovered himself by the time he had reached the hotel where Margery was staying. "The Signorina had gone out, and had not yet returned," he heard. Dalrymple was surprised. He had never known her fail at an appointment before. But he sauntered into the hotel, and, sitting down where he could command the entrance, took up a newspaper. But he seemed to have read every word in it, and yet no Margery appeared.

A fever of anxiety took possession of him. What could she be about? Where could she be? He had never heard of her little economy of going out to breakfast, which she had kept secret from him, not wishing to harass him by money cares, and he had no idea of any place in Florence where he was more likely to meet her than another. It seemed the best plan was to sit still; but that was fast becoming an impossibility. He seized his hat, and went and marched up and down before the hotel, almost running as he neared the corner of the street in his anxiety to see if she were coming round it. But the quick movement heightened his fever. He was getting fast beyond his own control. She must have heard the truth!—She must know all!—But how?—Where?—From where? Had she met Mariuccia? He had always dreaded this, cautioned Mariuccia to go straight home from the Studio,

only suffered her this day to wait there, because he had had such an early sitting, and he wanted her to go home accompanied by her aunt. If they had met, too, how should they know?—What should make Margery think?—Why should they speak? Anyhow, Mariuccia ought to be at the Studio, and he did not believe she would have disobeyed him, and left it to go out upon any vagary of her own. He had told her to remain there till her aunt called for her, and not to open to anyone. When he was at one end of the long, narrow street before the Hotel, he set off at full tilt to the Studio. If it had been from the other, he would have met Margery returning to the Hotel. It was just a chance, as we say; but life is full of such chances. Some people perceive in these chances the power that is beyond the foresight of the wisest of men. They call this power Providence. Anyhow, Dalrymple did not

meet Margery. He reached the Studio door, and went in. There, on the easel, stood the picture for the Grand Duke, left to dry, just as he had left it in the morning in the place of honour, taking the stage as it were. He had told Mariuccia to put it away before she went home. And there, leaning against the wall, was the picture of Margery—"Wrecked."

"Who touched that picture?" he asked, sternly. "Mariuccia!"

In a moment Mariuccia appeared.

"*Marito mio!* is it you? I feared it might be another stranger. That beautiful Signorina has been here. She told me to tell you so, and that she could not come again. I do not know how she got in. It seemed she had the key," said Mariuccia, glancing up for a moment with childish wonder. Then suddenly seeing Dalrymple's expression, "*Marito mio!*" she cried, "please do not be angry about the picture. It was

I who moved it, that the Signorina might see herself, and she begged me to leave it so for you to see when you came in. I never thought you would be angry; but the beautiful Signorina, she asked. 'Oh, no,' I said, '*é troppo buono.*'"

Dalrymple had sunk down upon a chair, and with his hands he was supporting his colourless face, looking up at her. He did not speak or move. But she ventured now to try to caress him with one of her hands, on which he looked with a sort of horror, and then up at her, and asked hoarsely,

"What more did she say?"

"She asked if I were married," said Mariuccia, "and I said, '*Si, nella Chiesa,*' and then I wanted to show her my ring, but the *bambino* would not let me, and she kissed the *bambino* all over."

The poor child was evidently frightened by Dalrymple's unusual manner, but she

tried bravely to keep up the appearance of being cheerful and unconcerned, saying, "*Si, nella Chiesa,*" almost blithely. But now Dalrymple interrupted her, and seizing the child from her arms, asked,

"Where did she kiss it?"

"Face, and hands, and everywhere," said poor Mariuccia.

Then Dalrymple kissed the child too, burning, passionate kisses, that seemed to terrify the child, and made it cry, on which he almost flung it from him into Mariuccia's lap, and buried his own white anguish-stricken face in his arms, moaning aloud. After a moment or two an answering moan struck upon his ear, and he started from his place, and looked to see where it came from.

Mariuccia had stood white and petrified, as Dalrymple had kissed his child. Then she had just recovered herself to catch the child, and save it from falling. Now she

had put it down, and was leaning against the wall, with one hand pressed to her side, and a face that would have made anyone heart-sick just to see it.

With a great effort Dalrymple dashed the hair off his forehead, and went to her, and passed his arm round her.

"What is the matter? Are you in pain, my child?"

Mariuccia looked up at him with such appealing eyes.

"Child!" she moaned, "I am your wife, Dallée. Dallée, is it not true? Am I not your wife?"

Her eyes had caught and fixed his. He tried to look away and could not, tried to look her in the face and lie, and could not. His lips stuck together, and he trembled, but he kept his arm round her.

"Mariuccia, why should you suffer?" he said at last. "Why should you have pain, because I—I am wicked?"

It was as well his arm was round her, for Mariuccia would otherwise have fallen at his feet in a dead faint. As it was he laid her down gently, and poured water over her, and tried to revive her. After a little while she showed signs of life, moved and moaned, and began to gather herself up. She said her aunt would be here directly, and she would go home with her aunt.

"You are not fit to go home," said Dalrymple. "Stay here, and rest a little longer. Stay here alto——"

Mariuccia looked at him, dumbly questioning, and his tongue clove to his mouth. He could not finish what he was going to say, and yet there was no anger in her glance, only patient uncomplaining sorrow.

"You are going away, Dallée," she said, "I had better go with the aunt."

"Give me a kiss then, at least, before you go."

Mariuccia held out the baby to him again. Dalrymple took the child in his arms, and kissed it tenderly this time.

"But you too?" he asked.

Mariuccia stepped back gently, timidly. She put her arms about his neck, she put up her face to be kissed, she kissed him even, but there was a look in her eyes that haunted him, it was the look of a woman whose heart had been broken. Dalrymple followed her downstairs, he carried the child for her, he insisted that she was not well enough to walk, that she must drive. "For my sake," he said, as she seemed unwilling. Then Mariuccia made no resistance. Her aunt, swelling with satisfaction, got into the carriage, and shook out her dress, and bowed and smiled to Dalrymple and the neighbourhood generally. Mariuccia got in after her, white and pale, but meek and gentle to the last. Dalrymple handed the child to her, after she had

got in, and pressed her hands with his own trembling fingers, as he did so. Mariuccia looked up into his face still with the same expression, but she bent and kissed his forehead. Then she drove away, and Dalrymple stood looking after her with that expression haunting him. He had never thought it would be like this, he had never thought of Mariuccia's suffering. Now he knew he might always have known it, if only he had ever once given any thought to anyone but himself in the matter. He went upstairs again, and sat down and cried.

"Is there a more despicable being on all God's earth?" he cried. "And yet they both love me. Both! Good God!" The very idea of thus bringing them together seemed like heaping fresh insult upon Margery. He was in love with her, not with Mariuccia; his love for her never had been very great, and it was of long ago.

It was not in his nature not be gentle with her, while she was in his presence, but he could not think of her now. Margery was his life, his soul, in whom alone he lived and breathed. He put on his hat, and went down to the Hotel. The Signorina had gone. She had said she had changed her mind, and left Florence that day. She had gone some hours ago. No one seemed quite to know where she had gone, or by what train.

"Let me at least see her room," said Dalrymple.

On the table was the bunch of violets she had stuck so coquettishly in her dress that morning. It was only beginning to wither, but there was a crushed look about it, as if it had been torn out with an ungentle hand. Dalrymple pressed it to his lips and forehead. When a servant came to prepare the room for fresh arrivals, she found him still kissing the violets. One

lock of his hair had turned white; that and his expression gave him the air of a maniac. The servant was frightened of him, the little boys in the street stopped in their play and stared after him as he strode along. He locked himself into his Studio, and set to work at once to prepare a canvas. He was bent on painting a picture of Margery as he had seen her that first day at Florence. "If you love me, I am here, and if you do not love me, I have still my voice."

The days passed, and Dalrymple painted. No word came from Margery, neither did Mariuccia's smile light up the carefully darkened room. He had told her he was going away, and that she was to stay with her aunt. Mariuccia did as he had bidden her. He stole out in the evenings to get some food, and to tear about in the moonlight, exciting himself still further by his restless walking.

All day long he painted. Hitherto his attempts at Margery had been failures. The picture he had lately begun of her he dared not touch. This was to be herself, as he alone had seen her, in loving humility. He left the eyes to the last. When they also were painted, when the picture was complete, and he stood back, and saw Margery looking at him, loving, trusting, appealing, as she would never look again; then he fled from the Studio, as if possessed by seven devils.

If he could have abstained from painting that picture in the first instance, if he could have conquered himself, and tried humbly to do his duty towards Mariuccia and his child, it might yet perchance have gone well with him. But he had maddened himself gloating over Margery's beauty, recalling all the mingled joy and grief of the past, and picturing the delicious Might have been. He was as much beyond his

own control now as any lunatic, and his one wish seemed to be to find Margery once more, and to die at her feet. He did not even wish to marry her now. She would not be Margery, not the woman he had loved, if she could be won by him now. But he could, at least, see her once more, and then—he did not know if he meant to kill himself, or only to die, if it were possible. He must see her once more, then he should know. He wondered had some shining star anywhere of late risen to view in the musical world. He was ready to wander through all the cities of Europe, but sooner or later he must discover Margery. He had yielded, and now he was beyond his own control. Nothing could stop him now.

CHAPTER VI.

LOTTIE'S CAPRICES.

LOTTIE buying her trousseau in Paris was a sight to be remembered. The light, girlish figure was soon well enough known in the Rue de la Paix, and on the Boulevard des Italiens, and many a shopkeeper hailed the distant shining of her fair curls with delight. Allan sometimes accompanied her, sometimes not; he always went to the door of her first shop with her, but he sometimes preferred a solitary cigar outside to a lengthened consideration of fashion's last vagaries, for Lottie was a true American, and could not lightly dismiss the question of flounces, or rufflings,

as she called them. Mrs. Van Voorhis was quite in her element, and considered it all a great deal more important than even Lottie did. And Paris being the seventh heaven of shoppers, the two were in a sort of ecstacy, only heightened to Lottie by the consciousness of Allan's stalwart figure, and grave, kindly face waiting for her outside.

Most capricious of fiancées was Lottie. There were days when she would shower caresses on her broad-shouldered English lover. On others she held him at arm's length, and seemed to consider him only a pretext for a trousseau. But in all her moods she was delightful; she was one of those girls who, at all events for a time, engross a man completely. Allan watched her, and thought about her, and thought of nothing else, saw nothing else. When she left the room it was dull, when she went away to do her shopping

he waited. His spirits never rose sufficiently for him to take pleasure in anything, he did nothing for himself, thought of nothing for himself, lived only to make her happy.

Sometimes Lottie realised, with a sudden ache, that he was still as sorrowful as the first day she had seen him after Margery's sudden flight, that though she had interested him in herself, she could not make him take an interest in anything else. But she put away the thought with decision. Allan should not see her sad, he should not recollect her otherwise than as light, laughing, lovely. In the meantime it was important that she should have every advantage that dress could give her. For Lottie saw it, though they did not, that she was wasting away, that soon there would be very little of her left. She sent Mrs. Van Voorhis imperiously out of the room, when she tried on her new dresses, saying it worried her to have anyone by,

and she ordered unheard of quantities of padding.

"That is more than you require, Mademoiselle," said the woman, who was trying on her dress one day.

"How do you know that I shall not require it soon?" said Lottie, indignantly. "Do as I tell you."

"Yes, do as Mademoiselle tells you," said the grand dressmaker herself, who was looking on. She was a woman who had seen much of life, and who charged something almost unpayable for her dresses —very often she was not paid. She had the reputation of being a cold, hard, worldly woman, and those who cared to know it, knew that she thanked Heaven her husband had died. "He was not *gentil* for a long time before that," she said sometimes. She stood by now, and looked at the young American heiress, giving orders regardless of price, and seeking, by

every possible means, to preserve her reputation for youthful bloom. But the forewoman was dense, and after a few moments she showed Lottie some material that she herself thought far preferable to what the girl had chosen.

"It will last far longer," she said; "it will last for years."

Then Lottie blazed up. "What do I want with a dress that will last for years?" she cried.

"Of course not," said the grand dressmaker, taking her forewoman by the shoulders, and pushing her out of the room. "You are a fool, Toinette; Mademoiselle will have a hundred dresses a year. She likes them to wear out."

Then, as she closed the door on the forewoman, she came back and handed Lottie a flacon. "There, poor child! poor child!" she said; "you are tired. Lie down a little. This shopping is too much for you."

And she bustled about the room, seeming not to notice that Lottie had burst into tears. But at last she could hold out no longer, and she came up and put her arms round the girl. "*Pauvre petite!* but yours is the better part," she said. "We all have our vocations, they say, and the angels have fixed yours for Heaven. Well, it is better than being a dressmaker. I do not know why I pity you. I should envy you."

Lottie looked up at her with tearful eyes, throwing her arms round her. "You think I must die?" she said. "Do you think there is no chance——"

"Not the ghost of a chance," said the dressmaker, decidedly. "I am already calculating what I shall buy these dresses back of your maid for, for of course she will send them to me. If you will have put them on, that is all you will do."

"Cruel!—cruel you are!" said Lottie.

And yet somehow she did not think so, and kept her arms round the woman all the time, the first woman who had talked to her of dying.

"Not cruel at all!" said the Frenchwoman. "Bah! do you think I am going to tell you lies, and you with one foot in the grave, and your guardian angel already taking your soul by the hand, as it were, to lead it up to the good God? I tell lies, plenty of them, to some people, to fine ladies who come here without souls or hearts, nothing but great bodies to dress," said she, with a scorn impossible to reproduce. "But when I speak to my dressmakers, I tell them the truth. I say to them you must cut out this dress so and so, or it will never sit, and I say you must begin at once, or it will not be ready. And I say so to you, Mademoiselle, you must begin at once, or you will not be ready. It is all very well to buy bridal clothes for the

beau jeune homme downstairs; I daresay he is worth more than the others. He may well be that. But it is only a few months with him, and it is all eternity with *le bon Dieu*. It would be better to think more about that. Now you may take back your orders, and say I am an *impertinente*, if you like. I don't care. I am tired of dress-making." And the woman went to the far end of the room, and taking up a light, gauzy substance, said—"There! that's pretty, is it not?"

"Yes," said Lottie, drying her eyes. "After all, how do you know you will not die before me?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"Come, dry your eyes, *petite*," she said. "The *beau jeune homme* must not see you have been crying, he must know nothing. Neither must the lady Duenna. She has a good heart, that woman, but she is an *imbécile*. She doesn't see you are dying,

not she. And she takes you out to buy fine clothes, when she should wrap you in cotton wool, and put you to bed with a crucifix on one side, and the priest on the other telling you to despise the vanities of this life. Ah! *mon Dieu!* we give our whole lives to them, and then when we are dying we say we despise them. Certainly a skeleton would look uncommonly nice with a robe *à la princesse.* I often wonder if they change their fashions *là bas.* But you, poor child, you have not spent much time over the vanities yet. Despise them, despise them, I say," said the Frenchwoman. "It is all hypocrisy on a death-bed."

"And you?—and you?" said Lottie.

"I have given all my life to them. I will not be a hypocrite now, when I can enjoy them no more. There—there is a lady I should not like you to meet, but I must attend upon her all the same. I will take her into another room. Adieu! and

bon voyage. Be assured yours is the better lot."

Lottie was pale when she came downstairs. She could not quite recollect what dresses she had ordered, and she slid her hand into Allan's, and said they would go for a turn in the Bois, and do no more shopping that day.

"Now, Van, don't try to dissuade me," she said. "The leaves are changing colour a little, and I like to see them, though they are not as bright as in America. And I don't want you to come too, I want to go alone with Allan to-day. I may, mayn't I, Allan?"

When Lottie asked in that supplicating tone, she knew as well as possible how Allan would answer. "Yes, certainly, dear child." But he looked somewhat anxiously at her that day.

"Lottie, dearest, do you think you are wise? You look tired, and it is a little damp."

"I am never wise, Allan, only in loving you," she whispered, and then they drove off alone together.

Generally, however, she was much more lively. And the special subject that made her lively was her cough. She had a little cough, not much yet, just a little cough, but no two year old child could have seemed prouder of it. They would all have thought much more of it, if she had not talked so much about it. As it was, Lottie's cough was a standing joke among them, and she seemed to consider anyone else who coughed infringed upon her prerogative. Gradually her cough was beginning to tyrannise over them all, but it tyrannised in the most agreeable manner. Sometimes it required shawls, all manner of pretty light shawls, that Allan had to fold round her, and that made her look almost portly and prettier than ever. Sometimes her cough required ices, sometimes

a turn in the Bois, always something pleasant, and that other people were sure to like. Sometimes it even required staying out a little late, because it was so much better that evening, or an evening at the theatre, because coughing was so *provoking*, and she wanted something to make her forget it. Never was there a more complaisant cough. Allan would quite have missed it if it had ceased to exist. He liked to ask after it, and pet Lottie, and fetch her shawls, and try to persuade her to sit out of draughts. Yet every now and then he would look at her a little anxiously. Then Lottie would exert herself to be particularly sprightly and lively. She would do all the little loving things that her enemies censured as bad style, but that Allan found delightful in her. Yet he himself would have seen something to find fault with in them in anyone else. The girl gave herself too

much to him, she lived too much for him already. But, poor child! she thought that she was dying, and she had got such a short time to be with him. Every now and then she said things that almost betrayed her secret. When they were all choosing the satin for her wedding dress, Lottie said,

"I think it will make a very nice pall. When I was little I always use to play at funerals. Van could not bear it; but you see Papa and Mamma died, and I saw their funerals, and I suppose I thought it was what happened to grown-up people. I settled then I'd have a white satin pall with white lace, and so I will. You'll see I have it, won't you, Allan?"

"My dear child, don't talk of anything so dreadful," said he, shuddering, and putting his arm round her, as if to hold her back. "You're too young to talk of dying."

"Too young!" cried Lottie. "I'm a

woman. Ma was only a slip of a thing. She was nineteen, wasn't she, Van? A child compared with me."

"Don't, darling. Don't," said Allan. He seemed never to have recovered his nerve, and he was quite white now.

"Why, what an old goose you are!" cried Lottie. "As if talking of it would make it come any the sooner! I believe you're frightened of ghosts, Allan. Well, when I'm dead, I won't visit you, I promise, that is if you bury me with a white satin pall. If not, I don't say what may happen. Now I won't say a word more, I won't, indeed, Allan." For Allan was covering her mouth with his hand, which Lottie now began kissing, till he took it away again. She seemed wild with spirits, and her colour was so high, and her eyes shone so brightly, that any man who knew nothing about it, would easily imagine that she was in perfect health.

But now, after this satin was chosen, Lottie seemed in a hurry to leave Paris. So, as no one had any will but hers, they moved south, and one day they were at Nice; there Mrs. Van Voorhis took up "Galignani," and read aloud a paragraph about a great singer, who was to make her *début* at Milan.

"It is Francesca—the mezzo-soprano. Don't you know?" yawned Lottie, with quite a *blasée* manner. "I think they say furs are to be more worn than ever this year, don't they, Van? I don't know what makes me think of furs all on a sudden, but I guess, Allan, I'd put on a shawl if you brought me one."

Then, as Allan went to fetch the shawl, Lottie exclaimed, in her most imperious tone, "Whatever you do, Van, don't say anything about singers before Allan. It pains him to hear anything about singing."

"Stupid of me," said Mrs. Van Voorhis.

"I guess, Lottie, that's why you never sing now. I'm sorry, for I liked to hear you, and you were getting on so nicely."

For once in her life a bitter smile curled poor Lottie's lips. Did Mrs. Van really think she could sing now, if she wished it ever so much? "And yet she thinks she loves me, and she does, poor old Van, but she notices nothing—nothing! No one notices anything," thought poor Lottie. "And I am dying all the time. And I must make haste and marry, or else Allan will never take my money. He must never know why I married him. What a pretty place they will make of the Priory! And I shall never see it! Here I am crying again, thinking of the pretty things down here, and Heaven is so much prettier, they say." For a few minutes Lottie reproached herself vehemently. She was in her own room now, she never allowed herself the luxury of tears but in her own room. And

she sat and thought now a little. Then with her thin fingers she stroked back the soft shining hair off her face, and went and looked at herself in the glass. "I am prettier than ever—far prettier than I used to be. Really pretty now. That is very good of God. He might just as well have made me die ugly. But He is making me die pretty for Allan's sake, because I wished so much to please him. I don't believe He is angry with me for wishing it, since He has granted that. And I know now that I shall be pretty to the end. I shall look lovely when I am laid out," said the girl, staring at her own reflection with a sort of horror in her eyes, as she pictured herself dead. "Poor Allan! how sorry he will be!" added she, with a sudden pang. "Well, I can't help it. I'd stay with him if I could."

It was a little while after this that Lottie announced she must go to Milan.

"I don't think it wise, dearest," said Allan, opposing her for almost the first time in his life. "You have certainly been coughing more lately. And it would be better to get to Naples and try a little boating, as that doctor recommended."

"You hate boating, Allan," said Lottie, reproachfully.

"I should like anything that was good for you, dear child."

"And do you think, Allan, I am going to victimise you, taking you out in a wretched little cockleshell, all because of a two-penny halfpenny cough and a fool of a doctor? No—no, that doctor I saw in England was the wise one, and he didn't say anything about boating, only that I was to take plenty of cod-liver oil, and never tire myself, and always to do what I liked. And I like now to go to Milan. You do not consider the Brera is what everyone must see. You see, you never look at Murray,

you delicious, slow old coach of an Englishman."

"Indeed, Lottie, I have read every word about Genoa," said Allan, brushing her hands away laughingly, as she ran her fingers through his light yellow curls.

"Genoa is not worth seeing," cried Lottie, lightly. "Sights are all comparative. But you see that comes of reading only about one place. I take a general view, and I know we must do the Brera. So let us start for Milan at once. *Do* now. Do let me have my own way in something."

"In everything," said Allan, laughing at the spoilt child's tone. "We will see what trains there are."

"Of course there is a nice train. There always is when I want one. Oh, you're a hunky bug, Allan! That means a splendid fellow, if you want a translation." And Lottie went dancing out of the room to give orders for departure.

But before she reached her own room, all the high colour and bright smiles had disappeared, and Lottie was very grave and sad. She did not know why she wished to go to Milan, she did not know why she wanted to come across Margery again, but she knew she wanted to see her once more before she herself married Allan. She had made up her mind that Margery was the new singer who was to have made her *début* at Milan under the name of Francesca about ten days before. She had read that bit of "Galignani" long before Mrs. Van Voorhis had read it aloud, and she had put on that *blasée* manner so unnatural to herself, and yawned and said, "The mezzo-soprano. Don't you know?" to prevent Allan thinking it was Margery, and make him fancy that she herself knew all about Francesca. But she had repented her piece of acting since then. She was sure that Francesca was Margery, and she

wanted Allan to see her again, before—before he married.

"After all, it was all very hurried," thought Lottie, "and I don't think he could refuse to take my money now. Not if I begged him, as I would upon my knees. Oh, Allan! do you know how I love you? When you look at me with those kind eyes of yours, and call me 'my child,' I could die just to think that I must leave you and go away, and know that you will love some one else, for you must always love some one, or you would be very miserable, my beautiful, brave, gentle Allan!"

Manon was very cross as she dressed Lottie that night for dinner. They had had a quarrel a night or two before, and Manon said now, reproachfully,

"You don't look a bit pretty, Mademoiselle, to-night."

"Don't I?" said Lottie, with a little snort of defiance, turning to her own re-

flection in the glass. "That's all you know about it. Mr. Stapleton will think me lovely when I look at him so," and with a great effort, she forced the colour into her cheeks and a smile into her eyes, and looked lovely for the moment.

"Mr. Stapleton is a fool," grumbled Manon.

"*Tiens!*" exclaimed Lottie.

"But as for him, I forgive him. All men are fools. It is that Madame Van I cannot pardon. Is she not a woman? It is well she had no children, for she has not a mother's heart."

With a smile Lottie raised her arm, and pointed with her thin fore-finger to the door.

"You think no one else can do my coiffure but yourself properly. But it is easy enough to get oneself *coiffée* in Italy, and for all you have been with me five years I can part with you, Manon. There's

the door, you needn't come back. Go now and tell Mrs. Van if you like, go now and tell Mr. Stapleton, but you'll never speak to me again, if you do, never—never—never." And Lottie began to hum a little song, tapping with her foot the while, and arranging the lace upon her bosom.

Manon looked at her. She was one of those great, strong Frenchwomen who make one understand the tales one hears of *pétroleuses*. She looked as if she could crush her little mistress with one grasp of her hand, yet she was accustomed to be turned this way and that by the little heiress's caprices, not only ordered about, but coaxed into believing what Lottie wished. However, at last Manon had proved insubordinate, and they had had an open quarrel, and now, to Lottie's surprise, Manon went. Lottie paused in her song as the door closed behind her; she made one quick step towards the door as if to

recall her. Then she grew very white, and sat down trembling. Suddenly the door opened again.

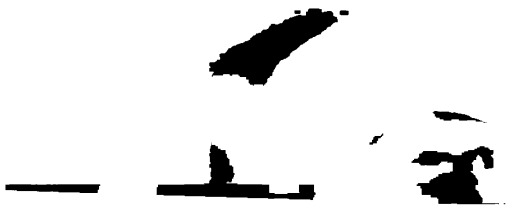
"Mademoiselle, there's a letter for you," and there was Manon once more, as submissive as of old. "Why, my little angel, what is the matter? Did you think I had gone to tell them? Did I frighten you?"

"You must never frighten me again, Manon," said Lottie, trying to re-assume her dignity. "It does me harm." And there was the great Frenchwoman on her knees before her, kissing her hands and embracing her.

"You look as beautiful as a rosebud, and for all I know you may live a hundred years," said Manon.

"There, that will do," said Lottie, patting her shoulder. "I must read my letter now."

It was from Una.



"My dear Lottie,

"Though Allan has behaved as if he were my father, cutting me off with a shilling—which, being only my brother, he happily could not do—yet I have never lost my sisterly regard for him, and so I write to you to warn you. Keep clear of Milan. Poor Margery has made her *début* there, not a success, I hear, and the manager quarrelled with her, and would not pay her what he had promised, and it turned out she had got the infection already. For she went straight home, and sickened with small-pox. It would be just like my wise brother to think he was called upon to go and see after her, if he hears of her being ill. So *verbum sap!* Leave out Milan. Though I'm terribly sorry for Margery. That grandly beautiful creature to die all alone of such a loathsome sickness! My dear, it gives one the horrors! And I never could help caring for her. I have been

so kind as to spare Talboys the harrowing of his feelings, so you see you're the first person I've mentioned it to, and you must forgive a little natural emotion. Would you believe it, Talboys is rather a screw after all, and won't give money unless he knows what it is for? I have to have my dressmaker's bills cooked horribly. It is dreadful to be so entirely in the power of such creatures, as one is when one is down for twelve dresses and has only had six. However, my pearls and opals are lovely. I never saw mamma so excited as at the sight of them, and she now begs me not to mention them, lest the bare recollection should give her palpitations. Is your cough better since you got to Italy? I hear it was quite troublesome before you left the Priory.

"Talboys would beg to lay himself at your feet, but I am too lazy to tell him I am writing. Please let me have an an-

swer, if Allan is not yet your lord and master. I rely on your making us friends some day. It is such bad taste to quarrel.

"Yours ever affectionately,

"UNA TALBOYS."

Lottie sat and thought over the letter. At last she said out loud,

"Una must be wanting a great deal of money, if she finds Lord Talboys stingy," and then she shook herself, that she should be making believe even in her own room alone to have been thinking over this. Margery with the small-pox! Margery dying! "I am dying," cried Lottie; "he must not lose us both."

Then some one knocked at the door, and told her dinner was ready, and she went down looking very white and tired. Allan poured her out a glass of wine.

"Drink this, my dear one. You are not well to-night. I think we won't go to Milan, Lottie."

"Oh, yes, we will," cried she.

Till then she had not made up her mind, but she had decided now. No one questioned her will again, and next morning they started for Milan.

The sun shone, and one or two misguided birds sang, as if it were Spring time; but Lottie lay back in a corner of the carriage, sick at heart, and dreading the future. For the first time she looked really ill, and Allan's tender cares for her only made her worse. She looked up at him with passionate blue eyes, thinking each time it might be the last that he should call her "dearest child."

CHAPTER VII.

I CANNOT SING THE OLD SONGS.

MARGERY had put on Lord Talboys' ear-rings, before she went to La Scala. She thought diamonds would carry weight with a manager. For the rest she was very meanly dressed, wearing that very same dress in which she had arrived at the Priory, and on her head only some black lace, as if she were a Milanese lady to the manner born. When she penetrated into the sanctum of the manager, who had only heard that a beautiful *Principessa* was asking to see him, he looked first at her, then at her ear-rings and her dress, and decided at once that she was beautiful

and a Princess, and had come to him for some caprice of her own, disguised, as it were. He imagined at once the heavy silks and creamy satins in which she was accustomed to appear, saw almost the traces on her splendid hair, where a crown was wont to press rather heavily, and began counting the royal families of Europe on his fingers, and casting surreptitious glances at the Almanach de Gotha, which might have helped him.

He treated her with the most distinguished courtesy, handed her to an arm-chair, and then stood bowing before her, as he said respectfully he had not quite caught her illustrious name.

"Francesca!" said Margery. She would heap no laurels on the name of Travers, that none of her family had yet cared to illustrate. It had been dragged through the dirt long enough, she would have no more of it. Her mother's name had been

Francesca, and there had been Francesca di Rimini. As Francesca would she sing, that was name enough for a singer.

The manager bowed, and anticipated a *mauvais quart d'heure.* He had heard so much of her name before, but he had hoped it had been by mistake only that he had heard no more. Now, how could he explain, that the fame of La Scala must not be risked to satisfy the caprice of ever so royal a grand lady? Doubtless she had come to be engaged as a singer!

Yes! for now Margery spoke again, briefly and to the point, her voice sounding metallic, and without a note of music in it.

"Shall you soon have a vacancy for a *Prima Donna?*"

"My dear lady," began the embarrassed manager, "to be a *Prima Donna* falls to the lot of but few women. The voice that has been most admired in private assemblies, is sometimes found——"

"You would like to hear me sing," interrupted Margery. She rose up from her seat, and walked with a stately step to the piano.

"Allow me to summon some one to accompany you," said the manager.

A little, old man, with a musical face, and hair growing very sparsely, and already turning somewhat grey, came timidly in, and sat down to the piano without even a glance at the stately beauty standing beside it. Margery was turning over the music somewhat carelessly.

"There, would you like to try that?" said the manager, somewhat patronisingly, as, in turning over Rossini's "Barbiere," he saw her pause at Rosina's "*Una voce poco fa.*"

She had hardly begun before the little old man paused, and looked up at her with a startled expression.

"It is not the Titiens," he exclaimed, "she is too young."

Margery recalled him to his duties, pointing to the piano, and sang on to the end. The manager bowed low before her.

"May I ask at what house you made your *début?* It is extraordinary I have not heard of you before. You sing always under the name of Francesca?"

"I have not yet done so. I wish to make my *début* at Milan."

Margery looked from him at the little old man, who was now standing before her almost trembling. He did not say anything to her, but his eyes seemed full of tears of joy. It touched her to see them. The poor, shabby old man seemed to her like a father. And no one had so appreciated her music before.

The manager tried to conceal his admiration. "Can you act?" he asked.

Margery looked up at him with a slightly impatient movement.

"You look at me, and you ask?" was all she replied.

"Pardon," he said, "I see that you can pose magnificently, but—— Try the jewel scene in 'Faust'" Margery looked it over for a few minutes, then she sang it, acting the while. Her acting was inimitable, but her singing now awoke some suspicions in the manager. "The music is not new to you?" he said, lightly.

"It used to be familiar," she said, "but I have not heard it very lately."

"Of course — of course," said the manager. "I shall be only too delighted to secure such a talent as yours for La Scala; but if I have not quite tired you already, would you oblige me by singing yet one more song from 'Faust.'"

He turned over the pages quickly, till he came to the song in which Marguerite expresses her rapture that Faust loves her, standing by the window and singing, "He

loves me.—The bird's song, the wind's murmur—all things repeat He loves thee! He loves thee!"

Margery blenched for a moment, then she sang. But it could hardly be believed it was the same person singing. The little, old man turned round in his seat, and looked up into her face once more.

"*Dio mio! non ha cuore,*" he murmured.

Certainly never had this expression of rapture been sung so coldly. Margery seemed to put violence on herself once or twice to sing it with more expression, but her voice only became harder and colder after each effort. Old legends of people who had sold their souls to the devil to gain great gifts, occurred even to the manager, as he looked at this woman with this great gift of beauty and of song, and yet, as it seemed, no heart nor capacity for tenderness.

Margery looked away, as if afraid that

he should read her secret in her eyes. She sank down into the arm-chair again.

"What are your terms?" she asked. "I engage myself for but one night. After that we can reconsider things, and make some fresh agreement, if I decide to sing again."

The manager preferred to discuss in what Opera she should appear. He was greatly puzzled himself; there must evidently be as few love-songs as possible. But, to his surprise, Margery showed no interest in this. She said she would study any that he liked. This was most unlike a Princess singing out of caprice. Yet she took very little interest in the arrangement either. Now that she had sung, and ensured her acceptance as *Prima Donna*, she seemed to have sunk into a lethargy. She was disappointed herself; she had hoped there would be some pleasure in singing at La Scala, but she supposed

it might yet come in rehearsals, or on the great night. Only so far there was no pleasure in it. She had found no difficulty, and she felt none of the satisfaction of success, indeed, so far, only mortification that she could not sing that song from "Faust," and had disappointed the old man, who had looked so kindly on her at first.

It was curious how all Margery's nature longed at this present time for happiness, crying out for it as a thirsty man cries out for water. Short of happiness, she did not care what happened to her, be it degradation, misery, starvation. She had been sorely wounded in the battle of life, and happiness would be the only salve for her wound. She wanted love, caresses, kindliness, riches, splendour. If she had had it all, she would have wanted something else. She wanted Dalrymple—Dalrymple as she had believed him to be, and as he never could be now. She knew that,

and did not cry out for him. After all, it is something to say of Margery that, brought up as she had been, having led the wild Bohemian life she had led, she never once contemplated the possibility of marrying Dalrymple, despite Mariuccia. The idea had not even once presented itself to her mind as a temptation. She had felt a great sorrow for Dalrymple, who might have been so much aided by a good, true wife, who thought nobly and kept him at his highest, but who now, with a peasant wife, who yet was not his wife, must, she thought, sink lower day by day, probably had already sunk lower since first he had known her. He had at times said things that now in the looking back led Margery to surmise as much. There seemed to her no hope for Dalrymple now. Let him marry Mariuccia legally, and vegetate downwards in the scale! No one could help him to rise now. Least of all

could she, Margery. But since she could not help him, could not cry out for him, who had so deeply wounded her, to heal the scar that he himself had made, almost unconsciously her heart cried out for Allan, not as lover, but as friend. Only in imagination, and for a little while, had he ever been more to her, but always from the first he had been her friend. And she had known no other. His was the only hand, that had stroked her hair tenderly, pitying her when she had a headache. To him alone had she ever revealed the little difficulties of her narrow finances, or her utter dulness whilst alone in London. He had always been ready to do little acts of kindness for her. Never once had she appealed to him and been disappointed. Even on that last morning of intense misery, when she was making up her mind to wreck his life and her own by flying from him, he had been patient and tender

with her, and let her lean her burning head on his shoulder, and offered her her freedom, yet had not pressed her to answer. Unselfish to the end, Margery longed for his unselfishness now, longed for the touch of his hand, the sound of his voice. She did not wish to marry him, that be far from her! now that she had betrayed him so cruelly, and become so altogether unworthy of his love. Only whilst the sight of Dalrymple would have been torture to her, she would have given all she had, even her voice, for one half hour of Allan's presence. But it was not to be. If she had known it, Allan was at that moment with that hand that she so longed to touch her own burning brow pressing Lottie's. He was calling her his little child wife in that voice that Margery longed to hear.

Yet was Allan inconstant? He never dared to think of Margery, and he often reproached himself very sorrowfully that

he did not love Lottie enough. He was feeling weak and dispirited, and he longed to make the girl who loved him happy. As for himself, no possibility of his being happy ever occurred to him now. But he would have found the world very blank without Lottie. She was twining herself round his heart-strings like a favourite child. Allan felt quite old beside her, he sometimes told himself his manner was too paternal towards her. Such an idea had never occurred to him with regard to Margery. Yet he was growing very fond of Lottie.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

"LA Stella del Nord" was the Opera at last selected, and though Meyerbeer's music seemed hardly to suit Margery so well as one of Mercadante's Operas might have, all went well in the rehearsals. Margery was grand as the peasant Catherine repelling the addresses of the Czar Peter, and bidding him do something great. In her impersonation of the character there was no love, but an overweening ambition. Afterwards, in the scene when she as sentinel peeps into his tent, and sees him making love to two vivandières, her vocalisation was perfect, but it was

again only rage and indignation that it expressed. One felt surprised to think she should afterwards go mad for love of a man, whom she seemed so little to care about, but one was glad she had, she was so grand in her white dress singing "*L'aurora alfin succede.*"

Wonderful reports as to her voice and her beauty were circulated through Milan. The prices were all raised for the one night for which she was engaged, and hardly a Milanese lounger but was provided with her photograph. The fame of Francesca was spread throughout the Penisula; and Dalrymple, listening to hear of a great singer, hastened to Milan. Seats were all engaged already; but a scene-painter, who had once been an intimate friend of his, secured him standing room behind the curtain, where he could at least hear, if not see.

The audience was getting impatient be-

fore the sixth scene arrived, and Margery appeared. She was herself surprised how languid and uninterested she felt. The beginning of the scene was distasteful to her, and she only wanted to get it over. But she was not allowed to begin it at once, the audience was on fire, and before she had sung a note bouquets rained at her feet. If they had heard her first, Margery thought, she should have been pleased. As it was, she felt almost insulted. Were they throwing her bouquets because she was beautiful? It seemed to her the extremity of degradation. Instead of giving the description of her going to ask Pracovia in marriage for her brother with the playfulness and lively gesture it required, she repeated it rather than sang it, with the wooden manner of a well-taught schoolgirl.

The audience shrugged their shoulders, stared, began to talk, finally hissed. Mar-

gery stood astounded; she had barely condescended to gather up the bouquets, but she listened to the hisses. As to Dalrymple, he could not endure it. He leant forward, and saw her—saw her the butt of the disappointed audience, whom the orchestra was vainly trying to appease; saw her, as she seized her opportunity, and herself shrugging her shoulders with all the contempt, all the bitterness of which her strong, passionate nature was capable, burst out with "*Amor! ah taci.*"

Above the hisses of the crowd, above their indignant murmurs, rose the scornful words, and the audience settled into silence like a scolded child. After that she sang better, but it could not be concealed that, as far as her singing was concerned, she had not come up to their expectations. "*Non ha cuore! E fredda!*" they murmured. As to her beauty, it certainly was magnificent. But the manager was in a rage. He

felt that for such singing as that he had no right to raise his prices, and he knew Margery could have done better. Not one person who had heard her at rehearsal, but felt sure she had not done her best. There were high words behind the scenes that night, and no one took the part of the proud *Prima Donna*, to whom some of them had been more than necessarily courteous hitherto, believing her to be a princess in disguise, but who had never been even decently civil to anyone in return. She was not decently civil now. She insisted upon having the money agreed upon, but she offered to sing once again for nothing. She knew she had not done her best, yet she had never tried so hard.

Next day she sickened with small-pox, and then the Opera company felt sorry for her, but she had offended them all, and she had got her money. They did not any of them feel called upon to go and see

after her now that she had sickened of this disfiguring disease. They supposed even her beauty would go now. Well, it was a pity!

Thus Margery was left alone with only a *donna di faccenda* to attend upon her, and her dreams to keep her company. She recollected how she had once tried to persuade herself that it was for her beauty alone Allan cared for her, and how then, as by a wild stretch of imagination, she had fancied herself having small-pox, and known that he would still care for her as much as ever. Well, now she had small-pox in reality, and with no imagination about it, and Allan did not even know of it, and probably cared for Lottie now. Yes, she hoped he cared for Lottie. It would be much better for him, Lottie was rich, and—and—— Then Margery's mind began to wander. She recalled the blotted, swollen face she had seen walking down

one of Milan's narrowest alleys a few days before. A child had come walking awkwardly along, had turned looking at something behind, and had stumbled up against Margery, and then turned again and revealed a face swollen and blotted by small-pox.

Margery had shuddered with a sudden sick feeling at the moment, she shuddered now at the recollection, and then half laughed to think her own face was probably already as revolting a spectacle as that, at the recollection of which she shuddered. She did not think about dying; she felt as if she were almost too miserable to die, too miserable and too sinful, but she wondered vaguely whether her beauty would be quite gone when she rose from her bed again. Did small-pox affect the voice too? If not, at any rate she could sing behind a mask, or three coats of paint, as she had seen other women do. But she began to wonder how

it must feel to go through the world with an appearance, that was disagreeable to the beholder. She had never thought about that before. She had rather prided herself on not considering her beauty, despising it, indeed. But she believed now this had all been excess of pride, an overweening confidence in her power to give pleasure without any effort on her part. She went over on her fingers the long string of men who either had been, or had fancied themselves, in love with her. They did not seem to her to have been worth making an effort to please, with the one exception of Allan. He was worth doing anything for.

With a sort of sick longing, Margery began once more to think of love in a cottage with Allan; how gladly she would have done all the household work for him, to give him pleasure! How happy she could have made him.

For, after all, Allan's tastes were really very simple. Take him away from London, and he would not require much, though there money might slip through his fingers. But how happy they might have been together, living for and with each other. That might all have been before he had taken her to the Priory, and raised her standard of luxury and refinement. And how hollow it had all been! What a profanation of the word to call it refinement! There was Una, brought up amongst it all, and ready to sell herself to the highest bidder, only for money. Was that refinement? And there was Lord Talboys ready to marry Una, or herself, or any other handsomer woman who might excite his jaded fancy. Margery did not think there could be anything less refined than Lord Talboys anywhere.

Somehow Dalrymple had not come into her list of men who had cared for, or had

fancied they had cared for her; but now her mind wandered to him. And her tears fell fast. She was weeping for him, not for herself. Her love for him, her hopes of a golden life with him, and higher happiness yet hereafter through him, all her hopes for herself connected with him seemed to have been scorched out of her once and for ever, when she had kissed his child, and the baby's eyes had smiled into hers, as his father's so often had before. The time when Dalrymple had last kissed her seemed to her now to be years ago, when she was young. She could hardly recollect how it had been, nor what she had felt about it. Not that she tried to do so. She did not think of herself any longer in connection with Dalrymple. But she sorrowed for him himself, as his sister might have sorrowed, his mother, his guardian angel. Yet Margery was very unlike a guardian angel in

other ways. She had fewer thoughts now of religion than ever before. It seemed all far away from her, as if she had no part nor lot in it, she born into the world, a Travers, with the bad Travers blood surging within her veins, and fated to make her go wrong sooner or later.

The illness took its course, and when Margery felt as if she had already been years thinking over all these things, the fever was only mounting to her brain. She became delirious now, and the *donna di faccenda*, who had been remiss in her attentions before, became yet more remiss now. After all, she had not been engaged as a sick-nurse. Who could expect her to attend upon a raving foreigner? The song that Margery had failed in singing to the manager the first day she had seen him came back to her now, and over and over again she tried to sing Marguerite's song of rapture. "He loves me.—The

bird's song, the wind's murmur—all things repeat, He loves thee! He loves thee!"

First she sang it to one tune, then to another, it would never come right. No wonder the Italian woman stole away. It was awful to hear her. Margery lay still, alone, singing in her delirium. No one came near her even to give her water, or to brush the flies away. It seemed, after all, as if she had thought a good deal of her beauty, for though she moved her arms wildly about in what she seemed to think gestures befitting her song, she never rubbed her face or hands.

The room seemed hot all over, and it was becoming more and more difficult to sing. Even an organ-grinder might have learnt some fresh methods of torture from Margery's rendering of Gounod's exquisite little song.

At last a breath of fresh pure air seemed to come in at the door, and there was some

one speaking in English beside her, and an angel with Lottie's face, only a glory instead of curls, bending over her. Margery thought it was Lottie at first, and started up in bed, and cried, almost fiercely, "I thought you would have made him happy! What business had you to come?" But then she fell back on her bed again, and knew it was not really Lottie, but an angel like her. For all seemed to become like heaven, now there was this presence in the room. Margery left off trying that impossible song, and snatches of old hymns came back to her. Every now and then she groaned, and called, "Allan! Allan!" Then always her pillows were shaken out freshly for her, sometimes a cooling hand was laid upon her forehead, and refreshing draughts were administered to her. It seemed to be a good thing to call upon Allan. But Margery had not sense to reason about it. She was wildly delirious now, and a regular

nurse was helping the *donna di faccenda* to hold her down in the bed. Lottie and a doctor were standing looking at her.

"I should like to see the doctor who has been attending her till now," said he. "I do not quite understand the course he has been pursuing. But to me the case looks hopeless."

"Hopeless!" said Lottie, and staggered, and almost fell into the nearest chair with a face as white as her pocket-handkerchief. She had denied being Margery's friend the moment before, denied it almost angrily, saying she was only the merest acquaintance, and professing to have come to her only out of compassion for a countrywoman alone and ill. The doctor naturally had not yet recognised any difference between English and American.

He was concerned now, however, to think he had expressed himself so plainly. Of course there was every reason for hope.

Such a splendid physique, doubtless a splendid constitution. And he believed English people often recovered from illnesses under which Italians sank. He would come again soon to meet the other doctor who had been attending her, a doctor of no note, called in haphazard, in the first instance. Lottie had sent at once for Milan's most distinguished physician. "In the meantime, rest assured, it is not black small-pox, and, after all, there are the vaccination marks." But then only a few minutes before he had told Lottie those old vaccination marks were of no use.

Lottie had come to Milan, and had appeared tired by the journey, and persuaded Allan and Mrs. Van Voorhis for once to go out alone together, and take note of the most beautiful pictures in the Brera, so that they might be able at once to conduct her to them afterwards. And Allan and Mrs. Van Voorhis had gone with the

secret determination to find all pictures alike unbeautiful, quite undeterred by any feeling of awe before the names of the great masters, for they wished to take Lottie further south at once. Then when they had gone out, Lottie had come straight to Margery, and found matters far worse than she had expected, and resolved at once that, having thus come, she could not now go away to take the infection to the others.

"As for me, I shall not catch it, for I am dying of consumption," thought Lottie to herself, almost proudly. But now it seemed that Margery was dying also, infringing on what Lottie had regarded as her sole prerogative. "Then Allan will have no one," said the little American girl, and wept to think that his bitterest tears might yet be shed on Margery's grave. Even in death it seemed she was not to have him to herself.

But Lottie had not long to weep, for presently there was a knocking at the outer door, and as the two other women were fully engaged, she herself went to open it, and there stood Allan.

"Lottie, what is the meaning of this?"

"Stand back. Do not come near me, Allan, or I will shut you out."

It would have been ludicrous, if there had been anyone there inclined to find it so, to see the attitude of the little slip of a girl as she thus imperiously commanded her sturdy lover, Allan being a very fine specimen of a well-grown Englishman. But neither he nor Lottie felt like laughing. He stood back at once, but he spoke with quite as much decision as herself as he said,

"I have never heard you speak of any friend so great that it could be your duty to nurse her. If it were your duty I

should be the last person to object, but as it is——"

"Do you know who it is?" interrupted Lottie.

"No, and what do I care who it is. What I care for is that you should come away, my child. Lottie, I order you!" He took a step forward as he spoke, and held out his hand as if to lead her away.

Lottie shrank back.

"You force me to remind you, Allan, that you are not yet my husband, and have no right to order me now." There was no sparkle in her eyes, nor any heightened colour in her cheeks. But she looked very determined, though there was a tremble about her mouth.

Allan felt at once that he had taken a false step, but he did not know how to recover it. Mrs. Van Voorhis had warned him, when he had urged upon her that it

was her duty to insist upon Lottie's coming away at once,

"Why, I guess Lottie 'd open her eyes pretty wide. Ever since she was four years old she has ordered me about, and I know better than to begin now. Leave Lottie alone, and she has got as much sense as another girl. But drive her into a corner, and you'd have a better chance with a mule."

Allan had not liked the simile at the time, but it seemed to him very forcible now. He had certainly driven Lottie into a corner by his advance upon the door, but he saw no way of getting her out of it unless he carried her off by main force. That he could not yet think of, so he resorted to woman's weapons. He went close up to her, in spite of her warning gesture, and put his arm round her, and bent down over her, saying,

"My child, I can't lose you too."

"Don't! Don't, Allan! You might catch it," cried she, struggling from his embrace for the first time.

"And you, Lottie?" he asked, reproachfully, pressing his lips to hers. "If you stay, at least I stay too, and as far as I can share the danger with you."

"Oh, no—no, Allan. There is none for me. But you—you might——" and she broke down.

"It is Small-pox, is it not?" asked Allan, and stroked lovingly her smooth, fair cheek, as he once more pressed his lips to hers. "Lottie, dear child, come away."

She looked up at him with her blue eyes wide open, and her lips trembling. Allan often remembered her so in after-days, the tears still wet upon her cheeks, and her hand trembling in his.

"Allan, if you will stay,—do stay. And I will not say another word. Only come

and lean out of this window, whilst I tell you who it is who is ill."

She led him away as she spoke, with her firm hand conquering at once any opposition on his part. But as she turned him to look out of the window, Allan said, laughingly,

"Lottie, what childish fancy is this?"

"It is no childish fancy, Allan," said Lottie, giving way, and speaking impressively, with a touch of the agony that was wringing her heart trembling in her voice. "I do not want to see your face. It is Miss Travers who is ill."

Allan turned round at once. His face was very white, but his arms were tight round her at once.

"And you were nursing her for my sake, Lottie? You must not; you must come away. I cannot lose you, my little child wife! My comforter!"

There were tears in his eyes, but

Lottie's were so blinded that she could not see them. He had drawn her face down on to his shoulder, and he was kissing it now. "I do not know which he loves most," thought the poor, tired child, "but I know he loves me now. It is enough. I must be satisfied. And I am."

"Call me darling once," she said. "I do so love to hear you say darling, Allan."

Allan's lip trembled. "Darling," he said, but the word cost him something. He had so often called Margery thus.

"You do not ask me how she is?" said Lottie, after a moment's pause.

"No! how is she?" said Allan, with averted face.

"Very ill; very ill, they say," said Lottie. "But she must get well."

Allan said nothing. Then at last he asked, "Is Mr. Bruce here?"

"No. He has never been near her. I asked. She has been here alone all the

time. She came to sing at the Opera, and she made her *début*, and the next day she sickened with this illness. No one has been near her, and I found her quite alone, when I came. Think of that, Allan—very ill, and quite alone! You will not prevent my nursing her now, Allan?"

Allan looked at her almost sternly. "Some one else could nurse her just as well as you. And I cannot spare you, Lottie."

"Please, Allan. It is the last favour I shall ever ask of you—your leave to stay here to nurse her—your consent. The doctor says I shall not catch it!"

"Do you bear a charmed life, then?" asked Allan.

"Yes, a charmed life!" echoed Lottie, smiling, oh! so sadly. "May I, Allan, may I?"

"You have yourself reminded me, I have no right to forbid you."

Lottie stood still looking at him. Was

he angry? Did he want to be left alone with the thought of Margery? She turned to go with a little sigh. In a moment Allan was following her, putting his arm round her again tenderly, protectingly, looking down lovingly into her troubled face.

"Lottie, if, as it seems, you have set your heart on this thing, I know I have no right to hinder you, but—but if you will do it, Lottie, why then I can but say God bless you! my darling."

Did he remember when he had asked the same blessing upon Margery? Anyhow, Lottie was satisfied. Allan had consented, and he had of his own accord called her his darling. She went back to Margery's bedside.

CHAPTER IX.

YOUR WIFE! IS SHE NOT?

ALLAN was left alone with his thoughts, and wandered to the window and looked out. If Lottie had known it, his thoughts were all with her. He dared not think of Margery, and how she was ill and alone—after all, alone; and his heart was very warm towards Lottie, for he knew how she was doing this thing, running this risk out of her great love for him, and he could not but love her the more for it. Besides, after all, she was in danger—this pretty spoilt child Lottie—in danger not only of losing her beauty—that, at this moment, Allan thought lightly of—but of

losing her life. Allan vowed that, if he could but once get her away from Margery's bedside, he would insist upon her becoming his wife at once, that he might have a right to order her this way and that, and thus to take care of her after the fashion of men, who thus treat the beings they sometimes liken to the angels, but of whom they demand a more absolute submission to their every opinion than they ever succeed in after-years in obtaining even from their children.

When the two doctors presently held their consultation, for want of a better place, in the little ante-chamber where Allan had established himself, they took little notice of him, knowing of him only as the future *sposo* of the little heiress, and not imagining that he had any further connection with the sick singer. Thus they talked quite freely before him, and they both agreed that Margery had got so much

worse, probably from want of care during the earlier stages of her illness, that they would not give much for the manager's chances of the free performance she had promised him.

"I shall not trouble myself to secure tickets," said the one doctor, laughing.

The Milanese celebrity did not laugh; but he shook his head. He thought if he had been called in sooner it might have been different, but as it was, he also was of opinion that Margery was dying. Allan sat by the window, leaning his head on his hands, without saying a word, or apparently taking any notice. Margery was dying. But he dared not think of it. The best was being done for her that could be done, and it was his duty to look after Lottie, and see that she could not overtire herself. As for himself, he did not think of himself.

Late in the night—at what hour Allan

never noticed, but it seemed that the night had been going on an immensely long time before, not but that it went on an immensely long time afterwards—late in the night there came a desperate ringing at the bell and a knocking at the door. Allan went to open it, carrying a lamp with him as he did so, and there in the darkness outside stood a man, whom he at once recognised as Dalrymple Bruce, not because he saw him, being himself blinded by the very light of the lamp he carried, but because he cried out, "You here!" and at once staggered backwards.

Allan did not see how changed he was, how worn and furrowed his face, and how loosely his ragged clothes hung upon him. If he had, perhaps he might have acted differently, but as it was, he only took a firmer hold of the door, rather closing it than opening it further.

Dalrymple, however, recovered himself

quickly. "Let me in!" he cried, springing forward. "Let me in! What right have you here? It is I she loved, not you—never you."

"Miss Travers is too ill to see anyone. She is ill. You cannot come in," said Allan, not flinching a inch for all Dalrymple's desperate advance.

"Ill! Ill! and I never knew it. I have only just heard of it. Let me in! Let me in! I know that she is dying—dying!" and he shook with emotion, and leaned against the wall for support.

"Yes, she is dying," said Allan, sternly.

"Dying!" cried Dalrymple, starting forward. "Not dying! not really! not dying! Dying, did you say?" All feeling of rivalry and animosity seemed to have died out between them in face of the awful catastrophe which Allan thus coldly announced to him. Dalrymple spoke as if he had

been told the world was coming to an end, and could not, would not believe it.

"Go! you have no place here," said Allan, utterly without feeling for Dalrymple, and carried away by a sudden storm of indignation against the man who must have turned against Margery, must somehow have played her false, or she could not have been found as she had been, ill and alone.

"I have a right, I tell you," cried Dalrymple, now setting his arm to the door, and prepared to contest the entrance.

"What right?" demanded Allan.

"The right of her murderer," thundered Dalrymple, while his eyes gleamed, and his breath came hot in the other's face.

"Then wait, at least, till you have murdered her. She is not dead yet," said Allan, and set his powerful shoulder to the door, and closed it in the other's face. He

locked and barred the door, then he extinguished the light and listened. After a while he heard Dalrymple go heavily down the great stone staircase, apparently falling against the wall every now and then, as he did so, almost like a drunken man. It was only then he began to recollect there had been something strange in his appearance and voice. And he went back to the little ante-room not quite satisfied with himself. After all, what right had he had? Had not Margery left him for Dalrymple?

Next day the Milanese celebrity came again, and looked at Margery.

"She will do," he said. "She will live. Hers is a magnificent constitution." Then he turned to Allan, and, as if by way of conversation, said, "That is a sad affair about your compatriot. You have heard of it, of course. There is no hope for him they say," and seeing Lottie and Allan both wearing a blank expression, he

went on—"An English artist of great talent, they say, shot himself last night, so exactly under your windows, I thought you must have heard all about it. He was taken to the hospital at once, but if he lives through the day that will be all. Fortunately a scene-painter at La Scala was a friend of his, and knew all about him, and they have telegraphed to Florence for his wife, the beautiful Mariuccia. You may have heard of her, the favourite model in all Florence. So many of your countrymen have painted her."

"What was his name?" asked Allan. His voice was very hoarse, and he did not look up as he spoke.

"Your English names are so hard to remember," said the doctor. "Bru—Bru—I think I should know it if you said it."

"Not Mr. Bruce?" cried Lottie, speaking for the first time, while Allan sank

into an arm-chair, covering his face with his hands.

"That is it! That is it!" cried the doctor. "Do you know him, then?"

"Oh, very well, very well," cried Lottie, wringing her hands. "And he is dying, you say? He has shot himself? *And* he has a *wife?*" she cried, with a sudden start.

"Yes—yes; at least, I believe so. I do not know if she is his wife. But certainly they have telegraphed for Mariuccia."

Allan shivered, and buried his face still deeper in his hands.

"Poor Margery! poor Margery!" said Lottie, calling her, as she thought of her, by her Christian name at last.

"He came last night to see her. I would not let him in. I told him she was dying. His blood is on my shoulders," murmured Allan half to himself, in short,

jerky sentences, and looking white and horror-stricken.

"You must tell him it is not so. You must see him again and tell him," said Lottie, bending over him and laying her hand upon his shoulder.

"No, never—never!" cried Allan. "Now that he is dying, should I go to him and tell him she is not his, not even in death?"

Lottie stood still, buried in deep thought. The doctor had just pronounced that Margery would recover. Her illness had taken a turn, and, short of anything unforeseen occurring, he was confident now that she would get well. How would Margery feel when she returned to life, and learnt that Dalrymple had shot himself, believing her dying, and died believing it? She felt as if she dared not nurse Margery back to a life that should be thus for ever darkened. Her heart ached for Dalrymple

also. Child that she was, she felt as if she could in no way estimate the agony he must have undergone before he had taken a step that to her was, indeed, hedged round with horror, that of suicide. She remembered how she had danced with him, and laughed and talked with him. How he had helped her in her trouble about Harry Yorke, and how cruelly she had spoken to him that last night at the Priory. How he must have felt it, married all the while, and in love with Margery! He tried to be good, said Lottie to herself, with the tears rushing into her eyes; and then she wondered how it had been when Margery joined him at Florence, and what bitter agony had been undergone by them both. Perhaps it would have been better if she had not nursed Margery, if she had left her to die. Anyhow, Dalrymple was dying, and she must go to him. It was impossible, she felt, for Allan to go.

"May I tell him she is not dying, Allan?" she asked at last. "He should know the truth, if he is dying. May I go and speak with him before he dies for your sake, for Margery's sake, for his own? May I, Allan?"

"Yes," said he, and shuddered. "I only said what I believed. But if he dies, I am answerable. I feel that. Only, Lottie, my darling, you go from scene to scene of horror, and all for me, all through me."

"That makes it all a happiness," said Lottie, gently. She was pale herself, but there was a spiritual look in her eyes, as if she were following a call from far away, and had no doubt about what she was doing, or ought to do. Allan let her go. He felt powerless to do anything himself. Dalrymple married? He had never thought of this. Poor Margery! poor Margery! Why had she not died? It would have been best. Why did they not all die, he

and Lottie and all? This earth seemed no place for those whose element was not one of startling shocks. For himself he had always wished for a quiet life. And he could not face Dalrymple, the man who had won her love from him, and then—left her to die! He sat still, with his face buried in his hands, while Lottie went out to the hospital, and there at last found the ward where lay Dalrymple, propped up by pillows, and looking death-like from the quantity of blood he had lost. By the bedside was Mariuccia, crouching over her baby, and in a weak, incompetent manner every now and then bathing Dalrymple's forehead. She was sobbing the while, and with her gay-coloured dress and uncontrolled emotion seemed singularly out of place in a hospital ward. Lottie tried not to notice her, as she walked straight up to the bed, and holding out her hand was about to press Dalrymple's in friendli-

ness when he drew it back, shuddering.

"It is stained. It is stained," he said, speaking wildly. "It is true it is only my own blood, but it is not for such as you to touch."

"Yet you must go with it among far holier beings than I," said Lottie, firmly, "into the presence of God and his blessed angels."

"No! no! No more angels for me. I have known them on earth, but never any more. By my own act and deed——"

"Give me your hand, Mr. Bruce," said Lottie, half pleadingly, half imperiously. "You have shown kindness to me, and that is all that I ought to remember now." Then, as she possessed herself of his hot, fevered hand, and held it lightly but firmly in her own slender fingers—"You have got to do one more good deed before you leave us. You have got to forgive Allan. He told you but what he believed last

night, what we all of us believed, but it is not true. The doctor says this morning that Miss Travers will recover."

"Recover!" said Dalrymple, slowly, looking at her as if there were a duskiness already creeping over his eyes, and he had a difficulty in seeing her. "You mean that she will live. Margery! how can she live? What life is there left for her?"

"I do not know," said Lottie, falteringly. "Only if God gives her life He will give her also something to do, I suppose. I do not know how that is. I do not know what has passed between you and her. I have only come here that you might not die believing a lie, that—— Is there anything that I can do for you?"

"Nothing," said Dalrymple, slowly, and the very tone in which he said it impressed Lottie more than if he had tried to pour forth to her all his despair and self-up-

braiding. "Yes, there is one thing, Miss Spluck, if you would—if——"

"I will do anything that is right for me to do," said Lottie, at once, seeing that he hesitated. "Allan gave me leave to come, so it must be right for me to help you if I can?"

"You are going to marry him?" asked the artist, looking at her with something of his old scrutinizing expression.

"Only for a little while," said Lottie, growing red, and bowing her head. "Then he will have my money, and—and time works wonders, they say. He and Miss Travers may be happy together when we both are forgotten. That ought to be pleasant, ought it not, to think of those we love being happy after all?" But though she strove to smile, her own tears were dropping fast as she spoke.

"That is not the right way to think of marriage," said the artist, putting his hand

to his head. "I am the last person who ought to teach you, but I am sorry to hear you speak like that, Miss Spluck. Marriage ought not to be for a little while, as you say. It ought to be for all eternity. When people do not think of it like that, they think of it as it ought not to be. I know that now, now that it is too late. And you are mistaken; Margery will never marry Mr. Stapleton."

"Well, that does not matter now," said Lottie, hurriedly. "I meant it to comfort you, and——"

"To comfort *me!*" said Dalrymple. Again there was that despairing and self-upbraiding in his voice that mere words cannot reproduce. "What call have I for comforting? When I asked you just now if you would help me—if you would—it was for one who has. My mother has sorrowed much for me in my lifetime, and if she hears of my death thus by my own

hand I fancy it will go hard with her. She has loved me always. I know that now, now that so many things are become clear to me. If I die, it is sure to be put into the papers. I cannot hinder that now. Will you write to her, and tell her I loved her to the last, and that my greatest grief is to think of her pain and sorrow for me. If I die, will you?"

"Yes," said Lottie, almost inarticulately. "Anything more?"

Dalrymple was lying back even more white and exhausted than when she first caught sight of him, his eyes almost closed as if in pain.

"I cannot think of anything more," he said, slowly. "She would not care for any of my pictures." He said it sorrowfully, as if even now it pained him to think how his mother regarded his beloved art, so that Lottie was more touched than ever. But Mariuccia's sobs, which had been re-

pressed at first, were breaking out now more violently, and he turned to lay a feeble hand upon her shoulder, and whisper to her in Italian—"My child, be calm—be calm."

His manner was so very gentle in speaking to Mariuccia that Lottie felt it easier to say what she had felt as if she ought to have said some minutes past,

"Your wife! is she not?"

Dalrymple looked up at her. His eyes said volumes of supplication and entreaty, but, though twice he tried to speak, no sound passed his lips.

"Not your wife!" cried Lottie, her cheeks and eyes suddenly blazing like a young archangel's, whilst words most unangelic proceeded from her lips. "If I had known that, I never would have come to see you—I never would have pitied—I—Yes, I will write to your mother, as you ask me," and, without deigning even to cast

one glance at the poor stricken Mariuccia, trying to swallow her sobs, and to rock her baby, all at once, and succeeding not too well in either, Lottie swept up her dress, and turned away with all the traditional worldly scorn for the woman who has been deceived; though in spite of her words she still retained much compassion for the man who had deceived her. But for all her air of not noticing she had seen the model's gay coloured garments, and the coarse dress of her child, and for the moment she was furious with Dalrymple, not that he had dared to speak on terms of intimacy with her when she had gone to visit him on what she believed to be his deathbed, but that he had exposed her to proximity with such a low, vile creature as she at once presumed Mariuccia to be.

Such is a woman's judgment all too often, when she herself has been all her life safely guarded from every danger of deceiving

or being deceived, and whilst women think thus, can they wonder if men, more tempted, act accordingly? Woman's want of magnanimity and shallowness of insight are probably at the bottom of more misery than those who cause it ever dare to realise exists. But in this case Lottie's anger was of service, though not to herself.

With a sudden flush Dalrymple passed a protecting arm round Mariuccia, whom for the first time he had seen scorned by a member of that world to whose contempt he had wilfully exposed her, knowing himself only too well how ignorant she was of its nature and its cause.

"Mariuccia, forgive me," he murmured. He knew she could not understand why he asked it of her, but he hungered for her forgiveness.

She pressed her cheek against his.

"Dallée," she whispered. "Will they

always come now? I do not like to see them."

It was the first jealous word she had ever uttered, and it cut him to the heart. He wished she would at least have said she forgave him, but he held her towards him, and thus resting her cheek against his she fell asleep like a tired child, as incompetent a nurse as ever ill-trained Italian woman was.

Poor Dalrymple! he felt that he was neglected. For the hospital nurse not unnaturally assumed that Mariuccia would call for assistance if any were wanted. And he wanted a hundred little things done for him, and no one did anything, whilst he lay there unwilling to move for fear of disturbing Mariuccia, and with a homesick longing for the mother to whom he had been sending his last message. How carefully she would have tended him! How stilly

she would have moved about! With what exactitude would she have attended to all the doctor's directions! He recalled her, as he had been wont to see her long ago, with a still, quiet face, in a white cap, wearing a soft grey dress that never rustled when she moved, always very sensible, very firm, very methodical, yet with a warm heart underneath that formal exterior, as he had always believed till she had cast him off when he would be an artist, cast him off and let him go from her, and never sent word or letter after him; though he, her son, of such a different character, had lingered here and lingered there, in hopes of a recall, and never believed that her decision would be final, that if he would be an artist, he could no more be her son. "Mother! mother!" he murmured, whilst the tears scorched his eyes, and he longed so intensely for her calm, gentle tones, and cool, soft hand upon

his forehead, that he almost seemed to hear her speak, to feel her hand, and then looked up only to be seized by a cold disappointment as he glanced round and saw nothing but the dreary hospital ward, no English lady mother standing by his side, only Mariuccia, sleeping off her sobs. And then he pictured to himself how his mother would look and speak if she saw Mariuccia, and involuntarily he drew the poor child nearer to him. No, he could not bear that. Better his mother should not be there than that she should pain by her scorn the poor little model whom he had married in church, and whom he at least knew to have as little comprehension of evil as the baby by her side. With all his heart Dalrymple vowed that if his life were spared he would marry Mariuccia, so that no one should be able to despise her again. She should be his wife in the world's eyes, at least. He longed for life,

that he might at least right this wrong if possible. But then there was his child! Dalrymple's eyes filled with tears again as they rested upon his child. That wrong was irreparable. After all, was the other less so?

Mariuccia woke, and looked at him with great startled eyes, and mechanically began bathing his forehead again, as if she had only been asleep for a moment or two, and were afraid of being found out. And all weary and in pain though he was, Dalrymple could not but be aware now that there was something changed in her, something in her expression and manner that he had never seen before.

CHAPTER X.

ALLAN AND LOTTIE.

THE days passed, and Margery mended slowly. The days passed, and Lottie heard no tidings of Dalrymple's death. She began to long morbidly for death to come amongst them; somehow it seemed as if no one were to die but herself, and she, poor child, would so willingly live on. Yet she was weary of life, it had become a burden to her. Her cough troubled her; dressing and undressing were an exertion. She wished she had spoken less hastily to Dalrymple, she wished she could love Margery. Even Allan irritated her. Why did he not interfere and prevent her from

nursing Margery any more? Had he in truth no consideration for her? Did he wish her to kill herself for Margery? Why did he not say straight out that he loved Margery, not herself, and that their engagement must be at an end? "Only it must not be broken off," she would then interrupt herself, crossly. "How can he have my money if it is?" The idea of her money had become a monomania with the little heiress, for whom, as it seemed to herself, no one took any thought. Meanwhile Allan was gravely saying to Mrs. Van Voorhis that she must exert her authority, and Mrs. Van Voorhis was replying that Lottie would laugh in her face, if she attempted anything of the kind.

"It is for you to make her fix a day for your wedding," said the American lady, somewhat testily, "and then, when she is your wife, you will see if she is so easy to manage."

At this Allan looked so depressed that Lottie's devoted chaperon hastened to efface the bad impression of her charge she had just been at such trouble to give him, declaring Lottie was "the sweetest, most amiable, loveliest girl in all America."

Allan did not reply to this, and Mrs. Van Voorhis began to think she had made a dreadful mistake. Was he, after all, still in love with this extraordinary girl, who had jilted him, and run away, and caught small-pox, and done everything a girl could do to make herself despicable and loathsome in other people's eyes. That was the way Mrs. Van Voorhis, who had never seen Margery, thought of her.

"She didn't even make a success upon the stage," she murmured.

"Who? Ma—Miss Travers?" exclaimed Allan, in confused astonishment.

"Well, Mrs. Van Voorhis, I will ask Lottie to fix the day for our wedding, since you think that is the only way to save her from killing herself," and he went straight out of the room, and found Lottie, and asked her. It seemed such a short time ago since he had asked Margery the same question.

Lottie made a few more difficulties than Margery had; she objected to this day, and then to that day, and was very confused, and grew red, and never once looked at him, but in the end she agreed to its being soon, very soon.

"And perhaps, Lottie, you will acknowledge that it is hardly necessary for you to stay in that sick-room till the last moment. Small-pox is most infectious when the patient is recovering, and now that Miss Travers has a good doctor and a skilled nurse you can hardly think yourself indispensable. You would oblige me very much,

if you would take leave of her to-day, Lottie."

Lottie looked up at Allan, puzzled by his tone, half humble, half irritated.

"I will certainly, if you wish it, Allan," she said.

"Thank you," said he, and wrung her hand, and then turned and kissed her with an agitation such as she had never seen in him before. "I cannot afford to lose you too," he said. "Life would be too sad without you, Lottie, and even to nurse you through a long illness would be a sad beginning of our married life."

Lottie tore herself from his embrace, and shut herself into the little room that she had taken for her own in Margery's apartment, and for the first time asked herself, if she were doing right to conceal from Allan the true state of her health. Solemnly and sadly Dalrymple's words recurred to her. "Marriage ought to be

for all eternity. When people do not think of it like that, they think of it as it ought not to be." She began to feel terribly afraid that she was acting wrongly. Hitherto she had been so sure that she was right.

But now it was all settled, she was to marry Allan soon, very soon, and now it only remained to say good-bye to Margery. Would it agitate her? Would she care? It seemed to Lottie that she did not. Margery only said, very feebly and slowly—

"You have nursed me for his sake, and he will repay you for your goodness—by making you—happiest among women."

"One day I hope you will be happy too," said Lottie, feeling only, when it was too late, how heartless it was thus to speak.

Margery did not answer.

"Good-bye," said Lottie. "I hope you will soon be really better. You know you are not to trouble yourself about money or

anything. I have arranged all that. You can repay me as much as you like some day, but there is no hurry about that."

"Thank you," said Margery; then more solemnly—"Thank you for all your goodness—all your goodness," she repeated, "and make him happy for me. Make Allan happy. He deserves it." Then she buried her face among the pillows sobbing.

"Yes, he deserves it," said Lottie, tearfully, "but do not cry. I cannot leave you crying. Allan would not like that."

"Does *he* care?" asked Margery, impatiently, then suddenly checked herself, and added in a different tone, "He has never asked to see me, has he?"

"No," said Lottie, very shyly, then rather stiffly, "Would you like to see him?"

"No! Oh, no!" said Margery.

"Good-bye, then," said Lottie.

"Good-bye," repeated Margery. Then

as the other left the room she felt as if she were indeed alone, friendless and forsaken. "I have deserved it," said Margery, but it was not the less terrible to her on that account this sense of isolation, from which the human heart always revolts as long as there is anything of humanity in it.

So Allan and Lottie were married, and went away together to sunshiny Naples, and drove about those lovely environs, and boated, and were gently, tranquilly happy. Only life was a weariness to Lottie. Then they went to Rome, and a Roman princess gave a grand ball, and the beautiful young bride and her husband were invited. They did not talk of Lottie as an heiress now, but as the lovely American bride. Her beauty was indeed greater than it had ever been, her colouring more vivid, her expression more spiritual. She was the belle of that ball. Allan was quite amused to see the tall, dark Italians, with their

black mustachios and ravenous eyes, clustering round her, speechless with admiration. But in the end he claimed a dance himself. He had hardly noticed what short turns in the dance Lottie had taken till now, and her feet moved so lightly, and it seemed so natural and so pleasant to be dancing with her again, recalling old light-hearted days before any tragedy had stepped into his life, and then departed, leaving all sadder and darker, that he danced on and on. As he paused at last, Lottie leant against him for support, and pressed a lace handkerchief to her lips. To his horror he saw the lace died red. Somehow they got away from that ball, and home to their Hotel, and a doctor was sent for, and then another, and Allan was kneeling by Lottie's bedside, pale, but peremptory that she should not speak. Thus some days passed. Then at last Lottie spoke:—

"Allan, I have always known that it must be so. Do you think I would have stayed on and on at the Priory just to see if you would have me, if I had not known that it could only be for a little while, and that this was the only way for you to have my money."

"I will never touch a penny of it," said Allan.

"Those are the first unkind words you have ever spoken to me," said she. "It is my money. Why should not I do what I like with it? You would not thwart me now that I am dying, would you?"

Allan's face worked, but he made no answer, only the veins in his forehead grew swollen, and his face flushed crimson.

"How long have you known this, Lottie?" he asked at last.

"Do you recollect one day when I drove over from the Priory to —— all by myself, and you all laughed at me, and my

clandestine expedition, as you called it? I felt so ill then, I could not bear it, so I drove over to see Dr.——, who is so celebrated there, and you know, Allan, I am rather quick at reading faces. And so I sat down in an arm-chair, and I said, 'Give me a glass of wine, please, doctor,' and then when I'd had it, I said, 'I'm quite ready now.' 'What for?' he asked, with that sort of doctor face they all know how to put on, grave, but saying nothing. 'Why, to hear your opinion,' I said. 'You see, doctor, I'm going to put trust in you, because I like your looks,' he had an awfully kind face and manner, and I'd heard so much good of him before I went. 'I didn't give my real name when I made this appointment with you, because I didn't want anyone to know I was ill. But I am Miss Spluck, the American heiress, staying at the Priory. You've heard of me, I guess. And ever since I was a little wee

bit of a thing, I've had everything I wished for, and now people call me pretty, and so, as you can think, I've found life pretty pleasant, and I'd like to know at once if I'm only to have a few more years of it, so as to have more time to make up my mind about leaving it. How many years do you give me, doctor?' He had been playing with a pen all the time I'd been speaking to him, but he tore all the feathers off then, and looked away, and said quite crossly, 'It is impossible for a doctor to say how many years a patient may live.'——But, Allan, are you listening to me?"

He was shading his face with his hand, and he did not put his hand down now as he answered a half inarticulate—"Yes."

There was a quiver about Lottie's lips, and she bit one of them pretty sharply, as if to remind herself what she was about.

"I was a little taken aback at first," she

continued, "but then I took courage, and I said, 'What! not a year? Now you have it on your conscience to tell me what you think, doctor. For I tell you honestly I am not fit to die. And I'm all alone in the world. There is no one to advise me but only you, if you choose to do so. Now, doctor, shall I see another Spring?' 'I hope so,' he said, quite gravely, and would you believe it, Allan, he was such a tender-hearted old fellow, there were his eyes full of tears. I didn't cry—I'd felt like it before; but I grew as hard as a flint then, and I said, 'But not another Fall?' 'You may live till the Spring,' he said, 'you may live on into the Summer, but after what you've told me about your father and mother, I don't think it likely.' 'And it makes no difference what I do?' Then he looked at me, and said, 'My dear young lady, it is impossible for me to tell you positively, but after the manner in which you've asked

me I could not lie to you so far as to say I think anything would much prolong your life,' and then he went on to give me a lot of directions, and to ask my forgiveness if he had spoken too bluntly. I think he is a dear good old gentleman, and worth all these doctors here, coming fussing with absurd ideas."

"Very likely," said Allan, uncovering his face now, but speaking fast, as if he were rather afraid of trusting himself, and not daring to look at her. "But one of their absurd ideas is that you are not to talk, Lottie, and so now you must listen to me for a little. Your old doctor is a first-rate doctor, of course—I have heard of him all my life—but that does not make him infallible. And I don't believe you ever believed him yourself, or else you never could have dared to become my wife without telling me one word of this till now."

"Allan!" exclaimed Lottie, indignantly, the hot tears rising to her eyes. "Oh, Allan, forgive me. I meant it for the best, indeed I did. You were so wretched, and I thought I'd comfort you, and you'd have my money, and then afterwards—afterwards you'd marry Margery. And I hope you will. And I hope you will be very happy, both of you," faltered out Lottie, almost choked with tears as she spoke.

But Allan was looking her full in the face, very white and stern.

"Lottie, do you mean to tell me you married me contemplating my marrying another woman all the time? Is that the reason you risked your own life at Milan? Lottie, my little child wife, tell me this is not true? That you never insulted me so far as this? Never degraded yourself so far as to think of marrying simply as a way of conveying your money to me. Lottie! I

thought you loved me, trusted me!—I thought you at least did," and Allan turned away, his face buried in his hands, and shaking with suppressed sobs. But in a moment he had conquered himself, and was bending over her. "Forgive me, my poor child, for frightening you. I forgot for a moment—how—how ill you are. But listen to me, Lottie, I will never have any wife but you—never—never, and as to your money! Why, Lottie, child, wife, do you really think that all your fortune could make up to me for my loss in you? You must get well for my sake, Lottie. Now do not say one word, my darling, not a word. I insist upon it. Only you may kiss me, if you like, and then go to sleep."

Then as Lottie, still trembling and tearful, twined her arms round him, and kissed him again and again, Allan whispered to her,

"It is true I loved Mar—Miss Travers

—Margery so well that I cannot bear to speak of it even yet. But you are my wife, Lottie, my wife and my darling, the one being who makes life tolerable to me."

Never happy! never happy! How sadly Lottie noted that Allan never spoke of being happy now! But how quickly he had learnt that nothing pleased her better than to be called his darling, that she still remembered how he had called Margery so, and the tone in his voice as he had done so. Lottie did not speak as she lay quite still, and wondered was Allan angry with her, had she hurt him by what she had said? She knew, whichever it was, he considered her too ill to know the truth, and was sparing her, as he would not have done had she been well.

And thus began the lifelong dissimulation that, entered upon from the best of motives, yet makes of so many married lives such weary work. Allan from this

day forth spared Lottie, and looked upon her as a child to whom he could not tell the simple truth. It is generally the other way—the wife who shields the husband. But in this case it was Allan who shielded Lottie, and tried to make life seem to her what he thought she would wish it to be. Lottie worshipped him in return, but sometimes she wished he would have treated her a little more like an equal. There would have been a truer rest in being nearer together. But it was very touching to the onlooker. When Allan, still believing that sea-air was the sovereign cure for Lottie, accepted the offer of Dick Woodward's yacht, and took her to Madeira, the kind people there, who generally rather pet the strangers that ill-health sends their way, delighted in the young couple; Lottie looking more flower-like than ever among the semi-tropical Madeira flowers, and Allan Stapleton such a typical Englishman

to look at, and such a tender husband, typically English in that way also, as this little band of expatriated English loved to say. For those who live away from their own country year after year are not seldom the most patriotic.

That offer of Dick Woodward's yacht would have surprised Allan if he had not been too much preoccupied with anxiety about Lottie's health to think of it. But the yacht had notoriously been offered in accordance with Randal Tollemache's suggestion, that it would be doing a kind thing to Stapleton. Now Randal Tollemache was not himself in the way of doing kind things to people. Anyone, however, who inquired into the details of poor Dick's subsequent career, before he acquired notoriety by shooting himself somewhere in the neighbourhood of Monaco, would probably not have required any further light thrown upon the matter. A good deal of the

money so hardly earned by Dick's father had before then passed through Randal Tollemache's fingers, only passed through, not remained. Randal's fingers seemed to have an incapacity for retaining money, but he had handled a good deal in his day. He handled Dick Woodward's quite at his ease, when the latter had put his yacht at Allan Stapleton's disposal to try if continual sea-breezes could somewhat dull that unhealthy brilliance in poor Lottie's cheeks and eyes.

CHAPTER XI.

"ONE FACE, REMEMBERING HIS, FORGOT TO SMILE."

WHEN the manager of La Scala received a short formal note, informing him that the singer, who regretted having disappointed his expectations on a previous occasion, owing to incipient illness, would now any night that he might appoint be happy to fulfil her promise of singing for him gratis, being quite re-established in health, and thankful to find her voice unimpaired, he was certainly considerably surprised. But like a wise man of the world he at once suspected treachery, and decided that in all proba-

bility the voice was impaired. Nevertheless the recollection of the excitement about her, her sudden illness, and the attempted suicide of a compatriot under her windows had not quite died out in Milan, and it might be as well to make the most of it. He accepted the offer, though ungraciously. Then Margery arrived, but altered.

It was hard to say what the alteration was, but the impression that she made was quite different. There were no diamonds in her ears now, neither did she seem to need them. Her dress was severely simple, but it suited her. She had aged considerably, that was certain. She had always looked womanly, but she was distinctly a woman now. Neither at the first sight young, nor old, nor middle-aged, just a woman, and very business-like. She was very particular this time about choosing her rôle, which she seemed inclined to study hard; very civil also to her fellow

workers. The singers, amongst whom the fame of her former haughtiness had spread, were quite astonished, and like the manager inclined to suspect something wrong. But they could detect nothing, only that she was strangely ceremonious and courteous for a *Prima Donna.*

She seemed anxious that everyone of the company should study as thoroughly as herself, and she was very considerate also when a girl in one of the choruses turned faint and tired. It was not that she said much, or did much, but she made them all feel that the girl's fatigue was to be respected, though she was a miserable singer, and there seemed nothing else worthy of respect about her. There was a settled melancholy also upon Margery's face; she neither laughed nor smiled, yet they all felt that she was courteous and kind.

Probably it has very rarely happened that ever an Opera was given where the

whole company so ardently wished for the first singer's success as was the case this time. They all felt compassion for the great singer among them who, without saying one word about it, had made them all feel that success was nothing to her, though she might take delight in song; and there was not one of them who, before the great night arrived, had not some special personal reason for feeling kindly towards her. Truly this woman had suffered much before she had become thus selfless. They felt a sort of awe of her, indeed a kind of repulsion from her as from something abnormal, a human being who had ceased to have any individual life of her own, who moved amongst them pitiful of their troubles, studiously watchful for their pleasures, but incapable of being troubled or pleased herself.

It began to be a known thing amongst the Opera company that that young girl,

who had turned faint at rehearsal, was a changed character, yet the Francesca had barely spoken with her, only made her influence felt. That girl would, however, have died for her now, and rightly so, for she owed to her what is worth more than everything, what no one else had ever conveyed to her even an inkling of, the knowledge that life has something in it beyond its pleasures. Dimly the girl divined this now, and trusted the Francesca absolutely, as we many of us say we trust our Maker, but do not; wondering ever what the issues of our actions will be, not content to do with all our might whatever our hands find to do, and to leave the issues to Him, trusting that He, who gave the good intention, will also see that its consequences do not fall out ill.

There was excitement and eager expectation in the Opera company when the great night came, but they all grew grave

and earnest in their own work when Margery appeared among them with her long lashes veiling her eyes, and her calmly statuesque movements and repressed manner.

Then she sang. Oh! how she sang! Her whole heart seemed poured forth in her song; all the pent back misery of the past months, all the repressed longings, and passionate self-reproach, and intensity of purpose to refuse the evil and to choose the good.

When at last the audience dared to applaud, it was like an Atlantic storm, deafening, carrying all before it. The manager was transported, each individual singer was as much rejoiced as if he or she had had something to do with that applause, but Margery sat quite still, her eyes drooped, her hands clasped, only an occasional tremor passing through her, showing that she even heard that applause. She had

not worked for that. Then the manager came, and led her forth before the foot-lights, a grave, self-contained, sorrowful-faced woman, who, even as she curtsied to them, managed to impress the audience, as she had already impressed the green-room, with a sort of awe, as if there were a great gulf between her and them—a gulf which could not be crossed because of her utter selflessness and indifference to whatever might befall her. She had sung well because that was her duty, she having the gift; she thanked them for their satisfaction in her song, because that also was right, and what she owed them, but it gave her no satisfaction. She had not sung for them, but for singing's sake.

When the Opera, was over the excitable Milanese would have drawn her home to her own door in triumph; but the manager interfered to stop that. He said he knew that it would give the Francesca

pain. All the Opera company knew that it would give her pain. They had not themselves dared so much as to congratulate her except by their eyes and smiles, and thus Margery went home alone and unattended. Then the whole Opera company had a great banquet to rejoice in her triumph. She, as she walked home through the starlit night, saw a woman, about her own age, tricked out in finery such as it is to be supposed gratifies some eyes. Margery, very simply dressed, stood still and looked at her for a moment. What she thought in that moment God only knows. What she said was,

"Will you do me the kindness to accept of me this Napoleon? I am one of the few fortunate ones who can earn enough money to live by. God knows it is not often the case with women."

She waited for no answer, but passed on, having uttered these few words of

truth not taught by the wisdom of this world, for what wisest government has ever acted in accordance with this simple truth, which yet one might have thought the daily experience of every life would have taught. "God knows it is not often the case with women."

The gaily-dressed one took that Napoleon, and looked at it, and looked after her, knowing her for the great singer who had sung at the Opera that night; she recognised instinctively the depth of suffering that had made the other woman speak thus, and for the first time had fully brought home to her her own misery and God's compassion. And she knew that there was no place for her in all that fair land of Italy, as, indeed, God knows full well, and some few men and women. And she took that Napoleon, and went hurriedly along with it, and still hurriedly dropped it into the box for the orphan children.

Then she herself sought a refuge in God's water. It was very cold at first, as the world had been to her, but she knew it was only for a little while she had to hold out, and then it would feel warm like God's compassion. Thus she drowned herself, judging, and judging rightly, that it was the best thing left for her to do under existing circumstances.

Yet suicide is sin. Only as men have arranged the world it is the best that is left for some women, whom we, not like them tried, should venerate as martyrs rather than condemn as suicides. If any doubts the truth of this let him learn what existing circumstances are for women in Italy. Then let him pronounce an opinion, but not till then. Margery went on her way, having given that Napoleon, knowing she could do no more, and, as she shut herself into her own apartment, realised that she had accomplished the dream of her

younger days, become a singer, and made a great success, and realised also that this success was absolutely joyless to her now. "What one wishes for in youth that does one obtain in old age," says Goethe, very mournfully. Reader, do you recollect being young enough to have read this sentence, and wondered what there was of sadness in it?

As Margery sat down to supper by herself, she wondered a little what Allan and Lottie would think of her triumph, what Una and Lord Talboys. Would Dalrymple even hear of it? She knew nothing of Dalrymple now, not even whether he was alive, but for that certainty within her that she should have known if he had died. Yet she had not known that he had been listening to her that night. Pale and hidden away in a corner, he, who might have been heir to an old English property, but was not; he, who had hoped to be a great

artist, but was not, had assisted at the triumph of the only woman he had ever really loved—the woman who had risked all for her love of himself. Then, when he was sure of her success, knew that her career as an artist was unimpaired by any fault of his, he had gone home purified and strengthened by her song to meet his own hard duties as the husband of the once beautiful model, the still beautiful, but, alas! now half-witted, Mariuccia. He found her in tears, and half beside herself, because he had left her. She had no rest now but in his presence. The shock of his desertion, followed so quickly by the other shock of his attempted suicide, had been too much for the poor child, never over-wise. She loved him, and she had never once upbraided him, but she made his life almost more of a torture than he could bear, for she only lived upon his words and looks. As to her baby, he could not

win even a passing notice from her now. Dalrymple had to be father and mother all in one to the child, whom he never looked at without a pang, thinking this child could never boast of his parents as other boys may be proud to do. Sometimes he almost feared now the poor little fellow might be killed through Mariuccia's negligence. She, who had never let him out of her arms while she was in her right mind, seemed almost jealous of him now if Dalrymple devoted at all more attention to him than to herself. Sometimes the young painter feared that, between what seemed conflicting duties, he should himself go mad; but, though he had never found her so inconsolable as on this night, he had never been tenderer or more patient with her before, for he had heard Margery's song, and he had caught something of her spirit.

Next day he set to work on a great

picture again. Mariuccia was the model, and she was happy once more, the first time since that dreadful day when he had made her his wife in the eyes of the law, and Mariuccia had wept and shrunk from him, and repeated over and over again—"I have been married to you in the Church, Dallée. Have I not been married to you in the Church?" over and over again, till he felt as if the sound would never leave his ears again. It was as if he had been selfish even in that, for Mariuccia never seemed to get over it, and, after all, what difference did it make to her? She knew nothing of laws, she cared nothing for the world's opinion, only for his, whom she had believed to be her husband. She was never quite so sure of it again after this last legal ceremony. It seemed as if again he had thought only of herself, cared only not to have cause to reproach himself. Dalrymple had felt down-hearted about it

all till now, but he felt down-hearted about it no longer. He would do what was right, come of it what should.

So he set to work on a great picture, and he settled that he would move back to Florence again with his crazy wife and with their child. Perhaps the old haunts, the old surroundings, and even the sight of her relations might do something to restore Mariuccia. He had feared her aunt's reproaches till now, but he feared them no longer; he would do what was right, come of it what should. And he would not stay any longer in Milan, where Margery was, and where, perhaps, she might remain as Queen of Song. He was thankful for her that it was so, that she had her Art for consolation, and her native resolution for support. Very humbly he was glad for her, and very humbly also he set to work on a great picture, working carefully at it as he had never worked

before, and without any idea this time that there was anything heroic in his conduct. Thus for the second time, Dalrymple Bruce returned to Florence.

CHAPTER XII.

WHY WAS IT, UNA?

"WHAT, Lady Mary, you, too, among the rinkers! I am delighted to see you again! It must be years since I had the pleasure—at the Priory, you remember, Sir James Stapleton's, my cousins; but everything seems years ago now. It is a new life that we live upon roller-skates."

"I see you are already quite a proficient, Mr. Walmsley. I have come to look on for the first time. An amusement thoroughly suited to the English, requiring neither wit nor study, and occasioning plenty of——"

"Scandal!" exclaimed young Walmsley,

bending down his ear, all excitement. "Yes, indeed it does. No one elopes but off the skates, and there have been five divorces——"

"Plenty of noise, I was saying," continued Lady Mary Redmayne. "Why, surely —surely that is Una—Talboys, is it not?"

"Ye-e-s,"—a yes so emphatic, so significant, so low that it almost necessitated the question, asked rather coolly, with an eye-glass up.

"Who is that gentleman skating with her?"

"That gentleman is not Lord Talboys. People have asked before."

"Really, Mr. Walmsley!" with a voice and manner intended quite to annihilate the young man. But he was on skates, and it was the first year of Rinks, and he was irrepressible, "you forget that I know Lord Talboys."

"It is Mr. Randal Tollemache," said Ned

Walmsley, impressively. "He left England some years ago, owing to a little—a little—— But it is the fashion to whitewash characters now just like houses—Henry the Eighth, and Anne Boleyn, and all the rest of them. Mr. Tollemache is in the fashion; his character has been restored to him now, and he is in the best society, that of Lady Talboys. I do not know that he frequents any other; but then, perhaps, he does not care to do so. Lady Talboys is looking prettier than ever, is she not? Like a rosebud, we all say—a rosebud with the dew upon it. She used to be paler, but—but there is no need for any woman to be pale now, and a delicate colour is certainly more becoming. She will look very well in crape, will she not? Everyone is saying how a widow's cap will suit her, and the ladies are wanting a new shape, I believe. Una Talboys will be sure to design one."

"Well, if I must hear all the scandal directly I return to town again, I may as well hear it from you, I suppose," said Lady Mary, resignedly. "So Lord Talboys is dying?"

"Shakey," said young Walmsley, decidedly—"very shakey. She has made him a charming wife—charming! No one ever saw them together, but then one has never heard of their quarrelling, and she has always looked delightful! He, of course, could not."

"What has become of her brother?"

"You know he married Miss Spluck. She has been ill ever since. They went to Madeira. They were coming home once, but then a baby arrived, and since then I've heard of nothing but babies. I believe there are two. No scandal there, I assure you. Admirably suited couple. She is ill, and he nurses her, and they live *en prince*, of course, quite *en prince*. Never

anything seen like it in the island. You heard that Miss Travers did not—did not marry after all?"

"Yes, I know," said Lady Mary, gravely. "I heard her sing the other day at Vienna. She certainly sings divinely."

"Oh! divinely! and won't come to England, give her what they will. Mapleson offered something fabulous. Gye outbid him. No good; she would not come. Won't sing in Paris either. Very odd. And as to that artist, he shot himself, didn't he? Shot himself, and then married his model! It is the way with those artist fellows. I know a few in London, very queer set. You know a man who wasn't an artist would have married Miss Travers. I wonder she has not married. Was not there, now, Lady Mary, wasn't there something very marked between Miss Stapleton and this fellow Tollemache before he—went away?"

"Is that before your memory, Mr. Walmsley? Yes, you are still young—in years."

"In my ideas! No, I assure you. Oh, in years! Yes, I beg your pardon. And where have you been, Lady Mary?"

"I have been spending the last two Winters at Bagdad, contrasting Asiatic civilisation with European, not to the advantage of the latter, I think, now that I return. By the way, I met an old friend from the Priory there, Mr. Yorke. He has become a great traveller, and is writing a book."

"In the fashion—quite in the fashion," said Mr. Walmsley.

"Indeed! Then what is your book called?"

"'The Romance of the Rink;' but it is only in my head as yet. Now, you see, as all my friends are on the *Saturday Review*, it really would not do, and so I skate.

Au revoir, Lady Mary; so glad you have come back from Bagdad."

"There's Lady Mary, just come back from Bagdad, and moralising over the inferiority of European civilisation," he continued to the next acquaintance he came across, "says the people are not revilers, or scandal-mongers down there, and especially they don't skate." Then, in a lower voice—"She seemed dreadfully concerned over Lady Talboys and that fellow Tollemache. A good thing old Talboys don't seem like lasting, etc., etc."

"There's a lady you used to know, Una. Introduce me. She is only just arrived." Randal Tollemache's manners seemed hardly to have improved upon the Continent.

"Lady Mary Redmayne! It is no use at all—no use at all, I tell you, Randal. She——"

"Introduce me, I say."

"Dear Lady Mary, how delighted I am

to see you back! You've been somewhere in the wilds of Africa, have not you? How good to see your face in town again! Do you remember Mr. Tollemache? No! let me introduce him. Mr. Tollemache, Lady Mary Redmayne. I suppose you have forgotten everyone. Are you sure you remember me? Mr. Tollemache has been travelling a great deal too."

"You have not been at Bagdad, have you?" asked Lady Mary, just glancing up for a moment; then, as Mr. Tollemache had not been at Bagdad, "You are looking very well, Una, and how—how is Lord Talboys?"

"Oh, very well. Very well indeed," said Una. "Dear old Talboys insists on my coming here. He thinks I'd get moped —Why, what is it? What is it?" she asked, with a sudden anxiety, strangely in contrast with the insouciance of her last words. Only a messenger to tell her

Lord Talboys was dying. Una grasped the back of Lady Mary's chair, and the chair shook with her trembling. The colour in her cheeks did not vanish away, but it looked strange standing out amongst the rest of her face so white. Some one pulled off her skates. Lady Talboys seemed hardly able to wait to have them taken off. She threw her arms round Lady Mary, and almost hurt her by the tightness of her embrace.

"Pray to God for me! Pray to God for me!" she whispered, and her breath seemed to burn Lady Mary's cheeks as she said the words. "It has come at last, O God!"

Who would have believed that Lady Talboys would have shown so much agitation at the idea of her husband dying?

There had been a sudden seizure, and there was no hope. Lord Talboys looked

very ghastly in bed, and Una stole up to the bedside shivering.

"Better, Talboys?" she asked, gently. She had heard he had been in great pain, before he had allowed her to be summoned.

"No more better for me," he answered grimly, and looked at her.

"Oh, Talboys, don't say that," she moaned rather than said, and leant her little soft, white face down among the pillows, giving him almost a voluntary caress for the first time in their married life. "Don't die, Talboys. Don't die. Anything but that."

"Why, you little witch, you! What do you care? By Gad, you act so well, Una, I was almost taken in by you myself."

"Talboys, that £8,000 that you settled upon me, is it unalterably mine? Unalterably?"

"Tied up as safe as lawyers could tie it."

"And all at my own disposal?"

"All."

"Oh, God!" moaned Una. "Oh, God! Oh, God! I thought you'd live, Talboys. You are not old. Why should you die?"

"What made you marry me, Una?" asked the earl. "I say, tell me all about it. I have always liked a story, and it can do no harm now. What, in the devil's name, possessed you to marry me, and makes you sorry now? For you are sorry, I see. I thought it was humbug."

"Sorry!" cried Una, desperately, tossing her arms above her head, a gesture so unlike her that even her dying husband wondered.

"Why?"

"Randal Tollemache!"

"Yes, I know. You'll marry him, and have your £8,000. Seems a comfortable little arrangement. I've watched it all along, and not to spoil sport, now I am dying."

"Talboys! Oh, I never knew what you were to me. I have been so safe—so safe. Only three years we've been married. And to have gone through that for this short time! You are in pain, Talboys. Wait! I never made a scene yet. I won't make a scene now. Wait! I'll be calm. Yes—directly. What can I do for you? Is there nothing gives you ease? Ah! yes, I see. No, let me do it for you, Talboys, you've been good to me. Yes, I've hated you, of course I've hated you, how could I help it, since I was your wife? But you've been good to me."

He looked at her, dying man that he was, with those same wicked eyes with which he had looked at the world for years past, and it beat him altogether. There she would be, a lovely young widow, with a title and a jointure on the morrow, and she was not satisfied, it seemed. What puzzles these women were, to be sure!—

and how pretty, how good to look at she was at this moment! The finished child of luxury, too dainty and delicate a creature for rough work or trouble, so that it seemed almost like putting her to wrong uses to let her prop him up in bed, and shake out pillows; but a creature so very charming to look at in the last new fashionable caprices of attire, that it seemed as if it ought to satisfy all her heart and soul hunger just to wear them, and look so charming! What could a woman who looked like that want more? It is a question the world has been asking all these centuries, turning out the very finest *chefs-d'œuvre* in the way of womanhood, surfeiting them with luxury, and then wondering on seeing what comes of it. Not just a picture, not an idyll, but that most incomprehensible creature, a woman with likings, opinions, even now with a claim for Rights. "Privileges!" cries the indignant

world. "Have not generations of men toiled and sorrowed to load you with comforts and pleasures? Rights are you asking for now! Shall we take it all back again, then? cry the men, all the blessings to which you certainly cannot lay claim as rights? Nay, in the name of all that is chivalrous, let us do just what we like with you, and be a picture, and make glad the heart of man." "Alas! I am a woman," is the answer, and the world, the world of men, being somewhat kindly, and also somewhat practical, is puzzled; for what is a woman? Not a picture now, it seems, not a doll, and, in the heaven's name, not only another man!

"Trust us for that," cry the women, and dart before the astonished eyes of bewildered men, now as orators, now as learned doctors, or women of science, now as fairies fascinating beyond belief, and all the while keeping up the old tradition of being sis-

ters and daughters, wives and mothers, loveable and loving.

"We cannot make it out," say the men. "It looks like a masquerade. Are you sure you will not turn into men, after all?"

"Trust us for that," say the women, and do something so foolishly, so fondly feminine, the men cry in indignation,

"Call that the science of healing! Call that the art of oratory! Why, you're nothing but just women, after all—the women that we love, and who love us. We thought there'd been a quarrel, and you meant to cut us out, and were coming over into our quarters to do battle."

"Nothing of the kind," say the women; "but you do not understand us, and grow cross, so we grew cross too. We always like to copy you, because you tell us you're the wisest. Now, it seems, it isn't so."

"*Indeed!*" say the men, and so on it

goes, and both grow somewhat wiser together, but very slowly. It might, one would think, be done faster, but each is chained to the other; so while the men force the women back, they themselves feel a living, struggling weight impeding their upward progress; and the women either are held back by their affection for the men, and natural wish to please them, or, throwing that to the winds, make no progress at all, and become phenomena.

All this *àpropos* of Una, to whom the very phrase of Woman's Rights would have been like speaking in an unknown tongue, yet who needed something more than the dying Earl of Talboys thought must surely crown all a woman's scope for longings.

"I'm glad I've had you for my wife," said Lord Talboys. "I've had everything this world can give, and a pretty good deal of it too. It was becoming time to change the scenes, I suppose, yet I can't

fancy there's another. Anyhow, till the curtain rises, soft music! Your story, Una."

"Do you recollect why Randal Tollemache left England?" she asked, looking at him intently. "That cheque—I forged it. I was seventeen then, and I knew he wanted money, and I fancied one ought to do all for love—all—all! It seemed to me quite a beautiful thing to do; but I never thought of its being found out, not the whole thing. It was. I went to a ball, and had to tell him. He said to me, 'Una Stapleton, you've ruined all my life. I must leave the Army, and leave England. I'm a ruined man by this, and, what is worse, disgraced.' He was already before that, but I didn't know it. I said he might give me up—I would confess all, but he wouldn't hear of it. Then he took my hands in his, and made me swear I would never love any man but him. I

swore it. I was only seventeen. He went away. I—I sent him money. I thought he had saved my reputation at the expense of his own. To me he was everything—heroic, noble, romantic. I had loved him before, think how utterly I loved him then! Besides, he alone knew my secret. It is a horrible thing for a woman to have a secret with a man, and such a man, and no one else to know! We corresponded. I went yachting to Italy. He played the part of hero to perfection then. He was very miserable, poor Randal! I had ruined him, and he—he—he never reproached me, but he *made me feel* it. Oh, God! the years passed. He wanted money—money, always money. If I spoke to a man any other girl could tolerate, I heard of my vow never to love anyone but him—never—never! Yet he wanted me to marry—for money, of course. He knew it could not last for ever the old life, and

he'd been regularly living on me for ever so long. I did all sorts of things. All my life was a lie. Then I married you, and, ah me! let you make that settlement. From that day Randal began to worry, that I might get him back to England—back into society. I've tried. Oh, if I could undo the harm I've done him, I'd gladly do it! But I'm older now; I know he was not quite such a hero. If the truth had come out, if it had been known that he had only accepted that cheque from me without making any inquiries, he'd have had to leave the Army just the same, he'd have been cut just the same. I know that now, and I've got to be his wife—his wife —Randal's—the man I loved. Oh, how I loved him once!"

She had buried her face in her hands now. Lord Talboys lay quite still. At last he said, in his harsh, grating tones,

"If you had told me a little sooner, I'd

have made ducks and drakes of the money somehow. I don't know how it could have been managed, but I'd have done it somehow. I tell you what, Una, I'd have shot the man for you. How well it would have sounded on my dying day! Shall we have him in here and try it over a handkerchief? I think I could hold a pistol yet. And he's asked you to run away with him, I'll be bound—made love to you, certainly, during my lifetime. It is a pity it is too late."

"Too late—too late, Talboys!" she said, uncovering her face. "I've told you about it, because it is a comfort to tell some one after all these years—after bearing it by myself for all these years. Why don't you cry shame on me, Talboys—a forger, a thief?"

"My dear girl, I always knew you were clever enough for anything, and I never thought you'd stick at a trifle."

"But a crime against the law, Talboys —a common criminal!"

"Sounds low, I acknowledge; but you did it neatly, and you never were found out. Curse the fellow! If he had told of you, I doubt if they'd have believed him. He looked a great deal more like a thing of the kind than you did, that I'll be bound. I say, Una, if you want to get rid of him, introduce him to Madge—Madge Travers! She wears a dagger, and——" Lord Talboys chuckled till he choked.

Then he looked up. "But I don't understand it one bit, my dear. You dressed, and you sent that fellow money. Where did it come from?"

Una looked down. For a moment her face was suffused with a rosy flush. Then she said, drily—

"Haven't I plagued you for money enough?"

"Yes, that you have. I thought you must eat it sometimes. I have not generally been reckoned close, that has not been precisely my fault," said the Earl. "But you did, you certainly did, spend more on dress than I should have thought possible."

Una smiled a little, fine smile, that passed away at once.

"And yet I never pay for my dresses," she said. "I am paid for wearing them. That is, Madame Philoselle does my business for me in return for—for my bringing out the fashions. Sometimes I invent them too. I have a talent for that sort of thing. When it is something specially extravagant, something specially calculated to take in the customer—Oh! you do not know all the arts there are about gores, and colours that must fade and look shabby as soon as worn,—but I know them all, and when I invent something after her

own heart, I get value. It has always been so. Then you remember, before you married me, you often gave me presents—lockets and things. Men often did. I always accepted them. I wore them once or twice, then——"

Una waved her hands. Lord Talboys looked at her with admiration.

"Well, you are a sharp one! Nothing of all this ever entered into my head. So all the while we thought you going the pace faster than any girl in London, and spending so that I have heard one or two men wondering what your liabilities were, you were regularly making a livelihood out of it."

"Regularly!" said Una, calmly. "I've supported Randal ever since he left England. I've done it well too," she said, with an air of satisfaction. "Sometimes it has been hard work. Since I married, it has been very hard work. He has asked

anything, and—and it is harder when one is married. I could get money through no one but you, and my own brains. And I am sick of fashions," said Una, "sick of them. Besides, sometimes—sometimes—I suppose you'll hardly understand it, but it seemed to me all fair formerly to take presents and things, and deceive the men, who would have deceived me if they could. Because, in any case, I danced with them, and yachted with them, and I made them the fashion just like the dresses, but now with you, I am your wife. I'd nothing more to give you, however much I could get out of you. It seemed like bothering, nothing else. And I hate bothering."

Lord Talboys was lying quite still, looking at her. Possibly he was thinking of what she was saying, possibly not, but as she paused now, he said weakly,

"Go on, Una, it is quite amusing. Go on."

"I've nothing to go on with," she said, quietly. "You know all about it now. I've made a clean breast of it, as they say. Now, Talboys," she added, somewhat abruptly, turning to him more confidentially, "why do people think themselves so clever? Don't you know, there's not one of them would believe I'd told you all this so quietly, and you were taking it so quietly? Not one blessed soul in London will believe I'm sorry you are—as you are," she added, quickly, a feeling of delicacy apparently preventing her from saying dying, though the word had evidently almost slipped off her lips. "And yet never probably was there a woman who will more feel a husband's loss! No one will believe it, no one but Randal, that is to say." A dark shadow passed over her face. "He—he will understand all about it. He always does, that is so strange!"

Lord Talboys was lying quite still. It

was so unusual for him to be so passive, that Una held out her hand, and pressed his in sympathy. "Poor old Talboys! poor old Talboys!" she said, with real feeling, while the tears filled her eyes.

"How well you do it, Una!" said he, almost laughing. "How well you do everything, you little puss, you! Now I wonder if you could have played the part of exemplary wife and member of society, if you'd turned your attention to it."

Una looked at him.

"Are you not frightened, Talboys?" she asked at last, looking at him with grave, wondering eyes.

"What! I frightened? My dear Lady Talboys, you don't consider, I've only a chance of hell, you're sure of it. There's a difference in the situations," and so delighted was Lord Talboys with this idea that he laughed aloud.

Una shuddered.

"Let me send for a clergyman, Talboys. There ought to be some one——"

"To see that the Earl of Talboys makes an edifying end, unlike all his life. No, thank you. I've lived without a parson, and I'll die without one. If it frightens you, pray don't stay, my dear. It takes time, you see, like most things. Can't even slip off one's clothes all in a minute, much less life. But there's no need to assist at the disrobing, unless you have a fancy for it, think it will be a consolation to you as Mrs. Tollemache. Eh? What will you do about your title, Una?"

"This is not a time to think of such things."

"Eh, isn't it? Sorry; for it seems all I've got, and I'd like to know. I always liked to know those little things. But I've great confidence in you, Una, that you'll decide aright. You always had excellent

tact and—and taste. I say, Una, I see it all. Tollemache is bored, deadly bored. He'll drink—drink like a fish, you'll see. You'll be free of him before you can say Jack Robinson." Then, what with a fresh attack of pain, and his delight at this last idea, the Earl's mind began to wander, and in his confusion he talked of Madge, and Una, and Tollemache, all mixed together. There were other names cropped up in his talk. And in the end it was a relief when he was dead. Una stood still, looking at him, realising that it was over with him, all over with the man whose birth into the world had given such joy to his father and his mother, and a whole host of kinsfolk, and yet more numerous host of tenantry, all over with the man who, for three years, had been her husband—that is, all over as far as this world is concerned. As she stood and looked at him, Una wished for the dead man that, at least, as far as

he was concerned, there might be no other.

"Even purgatory would be so dreadful," she thought, tearfully, "even the most spiritualised purgatory imaginable. He would not like growing good, and all that kind of thing. It was in evil he took all his pleasure. Poor old Talboys! now it is over, and he has had a happy life of it, I suppose. Is it really this kind of thing we are born into the world for? Just to enjoy as he has, and make an end of it? If so, my life has been a mistake."

"Mr. Tollemache is waiting to see your ladyship, as soon as you could be disturbed, my lady."

"So soon!" said Una, with a little shudder, "so soon!" and went out from the death-chamber to meet the only man she had ever loved—the man to whom she certainly had sacrificed her life. It was not over yet, that sacrifice.

London did not see much of Lady Tal-

boys in crape. Once she came gliding up the aisle of a very fashionable church, all black crape, and black-edged pocket-handkerchief, and smelling-bottle. She had her rouge on, however, and people found that she looked exquisite, only Ned Walmsley wished that she had rouged her eyelids a little. On a young widow's first appearance in society it would really look well to wear some traces of tears. In the meanwhile, weeds looked very nice. So apparently did not think Lady Talboys, for it was her first and last appearance in them. When next heard of she was Mrs. Tollemache. Society was not surprised, but it talked. What did that signify, however, to Randal, whom it had cut long ago?

CHAPTER XIII.

THORNS MAY BE WOVEN INTO CROWNS.

PAINTING in his darkened Studio, yet Dalrymple Bruce could not with the sunshine shut out the fame of Margery's song. It reached him, the fame of the Francesca, and he liked to hear of it. Sometimes working very wearily, it seemed to him that it was better for himself not to be yoked to her chariot wheels, making the tour of Europe gathering laurels. But there were others, when he languished to hear once more that voice that was making all the nations glad, save the English and the French. In France and in England the Francesca would not sing. He could have heard her easily, and yet he

would not, but painted on instead, and ministered to his sick wife, and grew to stoop, and looked jaded, poor Dalrymple! as if the mystery of life had been too much for him, and he had been kept in to puzzle over it, whilst all the others had gone out to play.

The other artists could not make him out at all. He had always had strange ideas, held himself somewhat above other men, talked of duty and aims. But now he painted strange pictures full of these same ideas, pictures with meanings such as one does not look for on Academy walls, and in a strange, old studied style, after Albrecht Dürer, the others said, and yet there was something very un-Düreresque about them.

He had joined himself to the new Italian School too, talked of Progress, and almost uncovered when he mentioned Mazzini. The very name had music in it, as

he named it. It has on the lips of some Italians. The old glow would come back into Dalrymple's face when he met with some of these men, and he and they would talk by the hour together. His brother artists thought it waste of words. He had strange ideas about women also, seemed in no wise to look upon them solely as models, creatures to be painted with this arm lifted, this foot pointed, then to be set aside. He treated all alike with courtesy, the beggar woman and the princess, and sometimes he said strange things: "It is very simple if you look on the world as simply composed of men, and treat it accordingly. Men have tried that method for some thousands of years. It simplifies the stating of the problem, only you have left out half the factors—just half. There are the women!" As if women counted for anything when wars or rumours of wars are on the *tapis*! Do women fight?

His very tenderness to his wife was a stumbling-block to other men. She had never been more than a model, and was now half-witted. That this man should consider her happiness in everything was really past ridiculing, it was a monomania, something like her own, that she could not be happy without him.

Allan and Lottie had returned from Madeira, and visited the Priory, and were now moving southwards again, trying a fresh climate, but still unable to remain in England because of Lottie's cough, a cough that had long ago ceased to be amusing and capricious, but which was in reality a much less serious cough now than of old. As they journeyed South Lottie persuaded Allan to visit Dalrymple's Studio. She wished to have her eldest boy painted, and she had a fancy to have his picture taken by the same artist who had painted herself.

They were startled by the change in Dalrymple. He stooped, and surely his hair was streaked with grey, and growing sparsely on the temples. His manner, also, was much gentler, and less buoyant than of old. All the time he was talking, too, Lottie noticed how he was watching Mariuccia. He left her side once, and went up to his wife, and bent over her, and said something so light and laughing in Italian that Lottie appreciated the more how worn and anxious he was by dint of the contrast. She noticed, also, how Mariuccia looked up into his face, as if she loved him, loved him simply above everything, as if he were her sun, and moon, and stars, all in one. She was very lovely, as she looked up smiling like that, her whole face one happy smile of love.

"I should like to kiss her, if I might," said Mrs. Allan Stapleton, who had often suffered twinges of remorse during these

last few years on thinking of Mariuccia, and who, married to a good man, had learnt to understand what true purity is! God help us! it is not so with most women.

"She would not understand it," said Dalrymple, gently, his eyes still fixed on his wife, watching her movements, as if not yet quite at ease about her contentment. "She is very simple, and it would only puzzle her. Thank you all the same, Mrs. Stapleton. I know how kindly you mean it."

Then he heard how they had come about their boy's picture, and Dalrymple at first declined. "I do not paint portraits now," he said; but then he saw the boy, and hesitated, and after a moment or two undertook to do it. The boy was such a lovely child, with his mother's delicate complexion and venturesome, wide-open eyes, but stalwart and well-grown like his father. Allan seemed justly proud of

him. It was strange that meeting again. They all thought of Margery, but no one mentioned her. She was singing in Milan again, but the Stapletons had not paused to see and hear her. Only Lottie wrote now a long letter to her. She wrote also another letter to a lady she did not know. She wrote to Dalrymple Bruce's mother, describing how she had found her son. "Recollecting his grief at the thought of the pain his death might cause you, I cannot but think you will rejoice to hear of him living thus nobly," Lottie concluded her letter.

Nevertheless she had been puzzled by his pictures, especially by one. It represented a large church, a very spacious church, and all around the church stood Saints in the painted windows; men and women, each with lifted hands as if in praise, each with eyes turned up to heaven, and somewhat awful in their stillness, as if more simply painted figures than was

necessary. At the far end of the church dimly seen was the altar, and round about the altar sat men and one woman, with crowns upon their heads, all in ermine, and with sceptres, but sitting very carelessly about the altar as it seemed. And in the centre of the picture a woman, the woman the great masters loved to paint, with a shower of golden hair, and tearful eyes, and deep blue cloak. But in the picture her cloak had fallen from her, and her face wore an expression of such agony as none of the great masters seem to have seen, not even Carlo Dolce in that wondrous picture of the Magdalen at Munich. For she was straining every limb, and with outstretched hands and tottering knees, hoping against hope, as it would seem, to lay hold upon that distant altar. Behind her, in hot pursuit gaining upon her, a man of evil countenance, and twice her strength. And as she looked at

that picture Lottie saw that another man in official dress was being despatched from the group about the altar to stop the woman; and only those who were sending him, and himself, and herself, and her pursuer, seemed to be conscious of that agonised woman there in the midst.

The stony saints above were holding up their hands in praise, and the crowned heads round about the altar sitting very careless, and between them and the woman was the choir, chanting, as the scroll above betokened, "Lead *us* not into temptation, deliver *us* from evil," all chanting very regularly, and not looking at the woman; and above the head of each a tiny spirit, that seemed like a demon, radiant with pleasure, and beating time to the music with hands and arms, as if to encourage each to continue in the chant. Yet, as she looked more closely, Lottie became conscious that there was one in

the choir who was not chanting, a young priest, with a pure, spiritual face, like the saints in Perugino's pictures. His book had fallen from his hands, and his eyes were fixed upon the suffering woman, and his face was very pale and sorrowful, and the demon above his head had started back in horror, and an angel was bending over him, tracing a glory round his head. He was the only one who was not praying, as far as the lips and look went; he was the only one who looked like praying in his heart, and he was white and sorrowful, watching that agonised woman. But even he did not notice the official coming forth to stop her, should her failing strength hold out, and enable her, were she unhindered from before as already from behind, to gain the altar's sanctuary.

"I do not understand this picture," Lottie had said.

"Very few people understand it," said

Dalrymple, quietly; then, "I have been years painting it, but no one understands it. Perhaps you will like this better, 'Virtue is its own Reward,'" and he pointed to the picture of a woman, yet young and lovely, begging her bread, a baby carried in her arms, two children clinging to her skirts, a sick husband lying on a sort of attempt at a bed by her side. The woman of whom she begs might be her sister but for the difference in bearing and expression; but she carries a pampered pet dog in lieu of a starving baby, and with the other hand collects her flowing drapery, lest it should be soiled by contact with the other's squalid room. Mariuccia had evidently sat for both women.

"Did you mean these for sisters?" Lottie had asked, timidly.

"Did I mean them for sisters!" Dalrymple had answered, a strange smile flitting over his face. "They look like it, do

they not? I think they might have been, and the more virtuous has met with her reward."

"I should have thought the poor, starved-looking woman was the more virtuous," said Lottie, doubtfully, after long consideration.

Dalrymple glanced quickly at her.

"The other one seems to have got the most of the good things of this earth," she continued.

"Of this earth," repeated the artist, musingly; then, quickly, "You think love nothing, then, Mrs. Stapleton—love and a good conscience? I have often wondered—often wondered! It seems impossible in this world to get everything. Those who try after that lose all. We have all to make a choice—or take what we can get, perhaps, would be nearer the truth. One gains fame at the expense of domestic happiness; the other, equally gifted, gains

only happiness, and having got that, rebels against the want of discrimination of the world—that he has not got everything else as well. This one has the consciousness of well-doing; that one wealth and a good dinner. The lots are different in quality, but more equal in degree than perhaps we think. Yet I don't know—I don't know," he interrupted himself, his eyes wandering uneasily to the other picture. "I see justice nowhere—nowhere. Only in the centuries to come we shall attain to it, I trust, if we take for our watchword the word duty, and seek the capability for higher happiness rather than just happiness itself."

He looked up to heaven with a sternly inspired air as he spoke, but Lottie was confused, and came away. As to Allan, he had long since left her, he could not feel easy in Dalrymple's society. It was only to oblige Lottie he had gone at all to the Studio.

Dalrymple was still finishing that picture of the heir of the Stapletons, giving it its final touches before removing it from his easel, when there was a knock at the Studio door. He sent his child to open it, his child, who was growing into a beautiful, graceful Italian boy, with nothing English about him but his speech. Then, as no one entered, though the door was open, he advanced himself to see who it was. The lady standing there had thrown her arms about his little son.

"His eyes! my son's eyes!" she said, and bent over the child, greatly agitated. Now she raised her face, and Dalrymple Bruce saw once more the mother he had parted from when himself a warm-hearted, hot-headed, ambitious boy. She was aged, and there were lines of care and grief in the face he knew so well.

"Mother!" he cried, and in an instant he was on his knees before her, seizing

her hands, and pressing them to his lips. "Forgive me, mother!"

"Forgive me, my son," said his mother, and passed her arms round his neck, kissing his forehead as she had been wont to do, night and morning, when he had been at home, years ago. "My son! my son! I have prayed and wept for you! I have loved you and longed for you. But I have been no mother to you. Can you forgive that, Dalrymple? Are you still the same Dalrymple, who could forgive anything?"

She was standing back from him now, looking into his eyes, and stroking the hair off his forehead, doing it all as only a mother can do, and noticing, as only a mother could, all the changes in him, who had left her a boy, and was now a man, who had lived his life, and sorrowed, and tried to live it down.

"I am still your son, mother," said he, with a little flush. "If there was anything

to forgive, I have learnt from you how to do it. Oh! but, mother, I have longed for you sometimes," and once more he took her hand, and pressed it to his forehead, and there was such a depth of wailing in his voice, it cut her to the heart.

But then a voice came between the mother and son, and interrupted them. A cry of anguish from Mariuccia. Mrs. Bruce turned round, startled at the passionate lament, but her eyes grew misty with tears, as she saw Dalrymple turn from her, and go and bend over his lovely, half-witted wife, and try to coax and caress her into comfort once more. Vainly did he tell her this was his mother. Mariuccia knew nothing of mothers, she did not remember her own, she had never seen Dalrymple's before, and she said she wanted no strange ladies, and refused to be comforted whilst Mrs. Bruce was there. The perspiration stood in great drops on Dalrymple's fore-

head, as he tried to comfort her. At last, hardly looking up, he said, hoarsely,

"I must ask you to go, mother. It has been too much for her. I never saw her like this before. No, do not take leave of us. It would fever her. Will you take the child with you? I should like to think he was with you. And you will find him very tractable and docile, not like what I used to be," looking up half with a laugh, then again intent upon Mariuccia.

Even his mother was tried by his devotion to his wife, and thought that he carried it too far. He would not suffer her to return to the Studio again for fear of exciting Mariuccia, and he only stole out, as it were, to take hurried peeps at her himself. She could not reproach him for not showing sufficient deference to his mother, who had come all the way from England to see him, because her heart smote her that she had never come till now;

and she could do it the less, because he so evidently rejoiced to be with her. But she told him he sacrificed himself too much. Then Dalrymple looked up at her, a quick, frightened look.

"I had sacrificed her first," he said. "When she was innocent as an infant, and beautiful as hardly any woman ever is, I, who had taught her to love me, deceived and betrayed her. What would be thought of a man if he deceived another man who trusted entirely to his honour? And why does it make any difference, if that other is a woman? Have men honour for men only, and may they lie to women? I confess it is beyond me. I know I'd as soon lie to a man as to a woman any day now. I do not alter my identity according to the sex of the person I am addressing, and all I know is, Mariuccia shall not have another grief that I can spare her. She is my boy's mother and my wife, and she was—was

one of God's angels, and will be yet again, I trust."

His head was bowed, and his lips moved as if in prayer. His mother never opposed him again, but she thought to herself,

"I am so thankful he loves her. After all, he loves her, not that great singer."

The English lady, with her somewhat strait-laced notions, had a terror of this great singer of whom she had heard. Meanwhile, she consoled herself for seeing little of her son by seeing all the more of her grandson, who was, indeed, docile and teachable as any grandmother could desire, but, alas! terribly un-English, as she thought. Even his devotion to his father had something Italian in it, for this child would kiss his father's coat, or hug his walking-stick when Dalrymple was not there himself to be caressed. Truly, this man had won love, if not fame.

And meanwhile, Margery was walking

her solitary path in life, moving the hearts of multitudes, as she had once wished to do, leaving it to other women to move the hearts of individuals. Her life was a very full and active one. There was abundance of variety in it and of hard work, and sometimes there were discouragements and rough words. The life of even a great singer is not all greatness. She travelled much also, saw many people and places, was sometimes sick and weary, sometimes strong and pleased with what she saw and heard. Life was certainly not a dream for her, yet she found time to think of Dalrymple far oftener than he thought of her, for, after all, she had no wife nor child; she had no mother, not even a childhood's friend, yet she alone, the unmarried one of the old Priory set, heard tidings of all those married, as is the way with women who have not formed ties of their own, and fettered their own interests in the doing so.

Margery corresponded regularly with Una after the first break in their acquaintance. She heard occasionally from Lottie. She had met Harry Yorke and Lady Mary Redmayne. Harry Yorke had become engaged to Lady Mary's niece at Bagdad. He seemed to have forgotten all about Lottie. He was writing a book, and he had paid his creditors, thanks to an old uncle's death. He had never known who his creditors really had been, neither did Margery know. She only noticed that he seemed quite to have forgotten Lottie, and appeared very happy and flourishing. He said all his old messmates were sure to read his book, and he counted up the number of favourable reviews that were already promised him. Margery had greeted him very cordially. He was cordial, too, but he never alluded to the Priory, nor to Dalrymple, his old schoolfellow.

Lady Mary had said something, she had held Margery's hand in hers.

"And now you are the most famous woman in Christendom, I suppose, and might have diamonds all day long to play with. Do you play with them or wear them now, I wonder? I see you have none on at this moment."

"I wear them when my part requires it," Margery had replied, calmly.

"We both staked much," proceeded Lady Mary, speaking slowly. "Most women have no hearts to lose. You have won fame. I wonder if it is any salve to a bruised and broken spirit."

"I am not unhappy," said Margery, equally calmly. "Possibly I delight in my success more than I think. I am quite aware how it would have grieved me to be only a second-rate singer. But I think the true comfort and the only comfort is in the thought of willingly and zealously

working out a Higher Will. I live alone, and a woman who does that has plenty of time to think, whatever may be the nature of her occupation. I have thought of the old wishing-caps, and what I would ask for, did I wear one. Nothing can satisfy but that, the sense of being perfectly in unison with the eternal harmony. All are dragged into the concert, and have to play their part, but many unwillingly, and some so as to spoil the melody. Once in unison, willing and resolute to the utmost of the strength, then it hardly matters what happens, life has become a noble Overture, some parts more beautiful than the others, but none perfect without all the rest. Even the minor key is wanted. I find much to do by the way, my days are full. Everywhere I see misery and a need for love. Some people talk of wasted affections. I see no need for that. I find plenty of people to love, even the ballet-girls—nay,

especially the ballet-girls. Even the tenor, I should say. He seems to need it least. But, poor man! his head is turned by his successes, and sometimes he himself is sad that his life is not more beautiful. Once he said to me, 'If all singers were like you, my life would have been different.' It touched me when he said that. He is considered such a great success by the others, and generally he is vain. It touched me he should own that he had disappointed himself. And you are disappointed too? Oh! work then, work for others. That alone is divine. It is indeed, I believe, the divine impulse in which we are permitted to join. For evil is but undeveloped good. If we would all work hard enough creation might be perfected, and then it would be the heaven people dream about instead of realising."

"We would all work if we knew what to work at," said Lady Mary, wearily.

"But all have not gifts, and some have—have titles and fortunes," she added.

"What is an aristocracy if it is not the best among us?" cried Margery, indignantly. "By your very title of nobility you affirm that you ought to lead the way. When Peers sink below the Commons, and find nothing to do, then sometimes I have thought," said Margery, "how they died off in the Wars of the Roses, and since then England has flourished, and that perhaps it will be once more needful. If they have ceased to be the noblest, let us take their places. Oh! I know I am a democrat—a democrat who believes in duties rather than in rights of birth. You have read Mazzini?"

"No," said Lady Mary, astonished, "and I do not follow your ideas. I thought it was the people claimed their rights, and we reminded them of duties.

"Your own?" asked Margery.

"Our own!" said Lady Mary. "I have been in Bagdad for two Winters—thinking—comparing civilisations."

"I have met with at least a dozen of our English nobility who have been travelling round the world doing the same thing," said Margery. "I have met a Manchester man, who had been collecting ragged boys off the streets, and making men of them. I sang my best to him, but he did not know one note of music from another. It was at Dresden that I met him. He had not seen the galleries, but he knew all the statistics as to the increase of population, etc. He wanted to know me only in order to hear from myself what was the limit that a woman could earn under the most favourable circumstances. He had seen the foundling hospitals, workhouses, prisons. I sang to him, and took him to see the Madonna. He was grateful, but he said he was a man of the people, and, for his part,

he was not sure about the fine arts. Plenty of people cared for them in Manchester. For himself, he liked better to see healthy, upright men and women than all the faded *chefs-d'œuvre* of great masters. It made me quite sad about my singing for a time. But I watched the gallery, and I saw that he was wrong. Song also does its work. All things work together for good. But let the nobility lead the way, or it becomes ignoble. I fear its day is over."

"You interest me very much," said Lady Mary. "It strikes me now I have never heard a Communist talk. I must make a study of one on my way through Paris. It is very interesting to compare various schools of thought."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BEAUTIFUL VESPERS AT WURZBURG.

WÜRZBURG, the town of many churches rarely opened—Würzburg, with its castle on the Marienbürg, and its rich red wine, and many towers, and girdle of rampart gardens—Würzburg, with its Residenz, "the finest parsonage I ever saw," as Kaiser Joseph said; and its Residenz garden recalling Dornröschen, who fell asleep while all the world in the distance went on its way, and slept on and on, till the fairy prince wakened her by his kiss, and woke and found all in the palace had gone to sleep with herself, just as it seems to have done in Würzburg. I

have seen Pompeii and seen Würzburg, and certainly my first impression was that Würzburg was a little the most dead and buried of the two. Pompeii has its sight-seers. Yet there are sights in Würzburg too, carvings and monuments, and the mirrored chamber of the Schönborns, and, above all, the Hospital which that terrible Charles XII. spared, when he had read its charter with the malediction on him who should do injury to that pious bequest. Medical students walk about the streets of Würzburg, marked already with something of the gravity and the stillness of their future profession. No noisy songs as in Heidelberg, no duelling. These young gentlemen will have enough to do in the carving line without beginning upon one another. It is a quaint, picturesque old town with dark holes and corners. One may live there a month, and yet lose one's way in it after all.

Mrs. Bruce, with her son and her grandson, took up their quarters in the dignified hotel of the Crown Prince, looking out on to the symmetrical square in front of the symmetrical Residenz, where no trees may grow for fear some Sovereign should some day take up his abode in the deserted palace, and wish to review his army from the windows. And they proceeded to see the sights of Würzburg. For Mariuccia was dead, and Dalrymple had sorrowed as if she had been all a wife could be to him, till his mother grieved to see him, and suggested change and travel. Listlessly Dalrymple had complied with her suggestion. He could not paint now he had lost his one so exquisitely lovely model, never tired of sitting, and always at once comprehending what pose he wanted; he could not paint in the Studio that had witnessed the daily surrender of his life to the whims of a woman who was not

responsible; he could not paint because he was so very free to do so, had no demands upon his time, might paint all day long if he so pleased. So he travelled with his mother and his child. Sometimes by the way he would take sketches, and he told his child delightful tales, and interested the boy in history, in romance, in painting, and in architecture. But his mother could not but see that it interested himself very little the while. And sometimes she wondered if his shoulders would ever again lose their stoop, if his eyes would ever regain their old bright, ardent expression. Once or twice she wondered how it would be if he came across that great singer of whom she had once felt such a terror. But Dalrymple never spoke of her, and his mother did not do so either. It was several months since Mariuccia had died. She had never rallied, poor child, from the shock that the arrival of Dalrymple's

mother had given her, and it was not for his mother to put thoughts of marrying again into her son's head, and, after all, this other was a singer, and might be—anything. Only she noticed how her son listened to singing, always at first with heightened interest, and then with an air of disappointment, as if it did not quite come up to his ideas; for himself, he had heard better.

There was to be a very beautiful musical service in the Cathedral that evening, they heard at the Hotel, so they wandered out to see the other sights first, so as to wind up with the Cathedral, before returning home for dinner. Next day they were to leave Würzburg. One night was abundance for the little old town of the Prince Bishops, and Dalrymple was already talking to his boy of Frankfort and Dannecker's Ariadne. So they drove up to the castle on the hill, and looked at the view, and saw many things.

"I do not like these little German towns," said Dalrymple, as they wended their way back again. "All the citizens are soldiers, and the soldiers citizens, and a woman seems as much out of place as she would in a barrack-yard. They have certainly won the right to work, these German women. I wonder what the result will be a hundred years hence of drafting all the healthy strong young men away to learn this extraordinary drill, and leaving the women and the weaklings to fight out the battle of life as they can, always, where it is possible, sending the strong ones a pittance, that they may smoke withal, and not go supperless to bed?"

"The tendency of the age," said his mother, in her precise tones, "is to disestablish national churches, and establish national armies. Germany has led the way in this movement; we must look to Germany to see what will come next. But

here is the Cathedral, open this time. Shall we go in ?"

To Mrs. Bruce, with her extreme Protestant notions, it was always a trial that her son, when he went into a church, would mingle with the worshippers, not contenting himself with a survey of the shrine in which, in so many cases, religion seems to have been petrified. It was so now. Dalrymple at once fell on his knees amongst Bavarian townspeople chanting out a lamentable cry for mercy. But gradually even his mother was moved to thoughts of piety such as were not habitual to her in a temple of another creed, for now there was singing, and above the others one voice, rich, pure, and perfectly modulated. Everyone seemed affected by it. It was a hymn of prayer to the Holy Spirit to enlighten our darkness, and when the others joined in, as they did occasionally, it seemed almost as if there had been some

middle being, angel or spirit, interceding between the troubled sons and daughters of earth and that Divine Goodness whose enlightenment they asked.

The service was over all too quickly. Then the organ played alone, while the worshippers passed out of the church, with much sprinkling of holy water and slamming of doors. Mrs. Bruce sat still, with her little grandson leaning against her; for Dalrymple was still on his knees, his face buried in his hands. But there was nothing unusual in his thus praying. This man, who had of old been given to speaking disrespectfully of methodical church-going, was given also to indiscriminate, spontaneous prayer. So Mrs. Bruce sat still, and calmly thought on the thoughts roused by that wondrous voice. She was thinking of many things which had never occurred to her before; but the worshippers were all passing out, and now came

down the side aisle a lady dressed in black, who, before passing out of the church, paused and looked back, and, as by a sudden impulse, knelt in prayer. They were the only two praying in the Cathedral at Würzburg, Margery and Dalrymple, within about a yard of each other, yet unconscious of each other's proximity. Only, as she rose, her dress rustled. He moved, and looked up, and their eyes met, after all these years of parting. Involuntarily he rose to his feet.

"Can you forgive me, Margery?" he said. "Is it possible that you ever should forgive me?"

And all her answer was, "Dal!" And she turned and looked round the church—looked at the high altar, then turned again and looked at him, and that glance seemed to say—"Can we talk of forgiving one another?"

"Oh, Madge!" he said, and stepped

forward and touched her hand. "Can you yet love me—trust me as once you could?"

"Nay, but better," she answered, very softly, and passed her hand through his arm. "I have heard of you sometimes, Dal," she answered, "very rarely. But what I have heard has told me these years have not been wasted for us. Not wasted, Dal," she repeated, in that full, rich voice whose veriest whisper was so distinctly audible, and looking into his face with her grey eyes fuller of love than even that day in the Studio at Florence, when she had come and offered herself to him, but not so shy or eager now as then; quite calm, as a wife's eyes might look, yet with a quiver of the eyelids, and a trembling of the mouth. "Dal, your wife died, I know; she was not unhappy, though. You were very good to her, and you—you—you loved her, did you not, Dal? It has not all been unhappiness for you?"

She asked it with such longing tenderness, as if even now that it was all over, she could not bear to think he had suffered much.

"No—no, I have been far happier than I deserved. I loved her. Oh, yes! my poor little innocent Mariuccia!"

Margery's eyes moistened, but they smiled also as she said,

"I have prayed—so prayed that she might be happy. And this is your child?" and she stooped and folded the boy in her arms and held him to her bosom, and leant her own face against his rosy, childish cheek, till before she let him out of her arms again the boy felt that he had won a mother, and loved her with all a child's devotion. If anything could have made Dalrymple love her more, it would have been for the certainty that he thus gained, and never lost again, that his poor orphan child, who had but an uncertain claim to a

father, and had never known a mother's love, had now, indeed, won a mother.

"And now, Madge dearest," he said, touching her shoulder gently, as she rose from that long, fond embrace of the child she had seen once before—and how seen! "now, Madge dearest, I must make you known to my mother. Mother, I do not know if you have heard of Margery Travers, but I must ask you to love her for my sake, and I am sure you will, will you not, mother?"

How humbly, yet entreatingly he asked it! He did so wish to give to Margery what she had so readily extended to his boy; he felt instinctively, yet so certainly, that the best thing he could give her, the gift that she would most value, would be a mother's love, if only Mrs. Bruce would consent to look at her with unprejudiced eyes. But Dalrymple knew Margery was a singer, and he was abundantly aware

that his mother's code was not his own, that she had her prejudices. Mrs. Bruce always spoke and did everything slowly, but she could hardly have said what she did so effectually had she spoken quicker now. She stood quite still, looking at Margery, then she said slowly, but distinctly,

"I have heard your voice and I have seen you, and I have seen the change in my son's face since he has met you, and it is not only for his sake that I say, Welcome, my daughter."

Then she stood on tip-toe, and tried to kiss Margery's forehead, but the great singer, who had received every compliment Europe could invent, the woman who had heard men's declarations of love all too often, and for the most part heard them unregardingly, could not bear this. Margery turned pale, and tottered fainting. She would have fallen had not

Dalrymple and his mother supported her. Then came up the Sacristan with water and all sorts of offers, and a few minutes afterwards they were all driving home together to the Kronprinz; but if Mrs. Bruce had had to make a little effort in the first instance to get over her prejudices with regard to a singer, all remembrance of that effort passed away as she noticed how, even from Dalrymple, Margery turned away to show reverence and tenderness to his mother, how her voice softened in addressing her, how her eyes moistened till, before that evening was over, the great singer had thrown her arms round the every-day lady, and, kneeling beside her, with her head pillowed on her bosom, had whispered,

"Will you really let me look upon you as a mother—will you really? I know that I could, if you only will, and I never had a mother."

"Madge, I believe you mean to make me jealous," said Dalrymple, playfully. Then, as she looked up at him with the wife-like look of loyal, tender, self-devoted love in her candid eyes, he hastened to add, "If it were possible to connect the thought of jealousy with you. But it is not."

Then she smiled, and Mrs. Bruce stroked her dark hair gently with one of those soft white hands for whose delicate touch her son had so longed when lying fevered in the hospital at Milan.

"I would say at once I would be a mother to you, but not—such a mother as I have been to Dalrymple. Oh! Dalrymple, come to me, my son!" and she caught him in her arms with an emotion such as she had never shown to him before, not even on first meeting him, not even after Mariuccia's death, when he had seemed so much to need love and consolation.

He did not need it now; he was loved and loving, and yet young, and with a sudden pang it pierced his widowed mother's heart, that they had all suffered much, but that for her alone there was no second Spring. Yet how tenderly they treated her, and strove that she should not feel this! They had suffered too much not fully to sympathise with suffering; for those who have grieved much it is more difficult to sympathise with joy—more difficult, but more pleasant. Thus Mrs. Bruce found it, as gradually she learnt this new lesson. But that was only after a time.

Next morning they did not leave Würzburg, but Margery and Dalrymple sauntered across the symmetrical Square into the desolate Residenz garden. It was Winter-time, and the statues round the fountain wore their icicles bravely, whilst the sun shone out somewhat frostily, lighting here, there, everywhere, yet giving

everything rather a weird than sunshiny effect. An elderly maiden lady passed them, twittering to the birds; she seemed to think the birds loved and knew her. It was evidently her daily walk. A love-sick student sauntered up and down, as if waiting for some one. "She cometh not," he seemed to say; and at last he, too, disappeared into the dingy streets of Würzburg, and the recesses of a Bier-lokal. It was evidently Dornröschen's garden, and she had not wakened yet, so they had it all to themselves.

Dalrymple and Margery went on to the terrace that commanded the view, and leaned on the balustrade, looking down upon the cut bushes, and marble staircases and fountains, and all the forsaken splendours of the old Prince Bishops. In the distance there was the Cathedral, with their sepulchres.

They were both older than when we saw

them first, both bearing many marks of time and sorrow; but what a great peace was theirs! What a thanksgiving in their hearts!

After a while they passed down a flight of steps, and along an avenue of pollarded planes. The trees looked as if in torment in the pitiless wintry sunlight, with no leaves to veil the curiously knotted twigs into which the ingenuity of man had forced what might have been powerful, healthy, natural branches.

"The shade must be very grateful here in Summer," said Margery, looking up, so that the sun shone upon the full white curve of her throat, and made even her eyes blink a little.

"To the passer-by," said Dalrymple. "This avenue reminds me of most women's lives. Cut off from every natural outlet, the inborn vigour takes refuge in a thousand complicated little fancies and caprices,

such as there is no unweaving. The effect is very pleasing to the passer-by. What a very charming creature may not a fashionable fine lady be—a creature far too lovely, and delicate, and artificial for anyone to connect the low idea of utility therewith! But I doubt whether the tree would not have lasted longer if trusted to Nature's guiding; it might, at all events, have produced good timber."

"I am always sorry for fine ladies," said Margery, thoughtfully. "Schopenhauer said they reminded him of nothing but the sacred monkeys of Benares, and though his view of life had a twist in it, I have never forgotten that simile. Yet what should a Duke's daughter do?"

Then they fell to talking politics, and found they had strangely the same opinions, only Dalrymple's had still the strongest religious undercurrent. He referred to the Bible to support his views, Margery to

the book of nature and her own experiences, but their conclusions were strangely similar. Somehow they said nothing about their love for one another, that seemed to need no protestations, no assurances, nor words of explanation. They understood each other.

CHAPTER XV.

SETTING TOWARDS ETERNITY.

"ON Thursday, March 25th, at Biarritz, suddenly, Randal Tollemache."

What! Randal Tollemache dead! On the strength of that news Margery went herself to the Priory, and told Allan Stapleton he should fetch his sister home. It was the first time they had met. Allan was somewhat silent and abstracted.

"You may be sure he has left her in want," said Margery. "You may be sure he has spent every penny he could lay hands on. You may be sure he has ill-treated her. Una is alone, friendless, and destitute, and broken-hearted in a foreign

land. She should be brought home, and you are her only brother."

"I do not know about leaving Lottie and the children," said Allan, and seemed to consider many things.

Margery, who was so very clear about it all, and could picture to herself exactly every detail of Una's situation, felt impatient. How Allan would have tried her by his slowness! Dalrymple would have been packing his portmanteau long ere this.

"Let me ask Lottie what she thinks," she said, to hasten him.

"Oh, no, no!" said Allan, astonished. "Lottie would not think anything. It is not necessary to trouble her. Yes, I suppose it must be done. I am glad you have suggested it to me. I should never have thought of it, and I believe it is the right thing to do. After all, Una is my sister."

Then he looked at Margery, and noted the changes in her. She certainly was not irresistibly beautiful as she had used to be, at all events in his eyes, but she was still very beautifnl. Only Allan thought—somehow it occurred to him quite without his intending to think about it—that life would have been harder work than he himself quite cared about, married to such a woman. Seen in juxtaposition with Lottie a few minutes afterwards he could not help feeling that Lottie was the lightest, and brightest, and most amusing, and she looked certainly far the youngest. She appeared like a mere child compared with Margery now, yet they were just about the same age. Lottie was full of a new Altar cloth she was working, she was also giving a children's party, and she wanted to show Margery the Schools and a new Almshouse she was building, also a Shetland pony just arrived.

"What! Mr. Tollemache dead!" she said. "No, I never noticed it in the paper. Oh, Allan would never go to fetch Una. He does not care to have her mentioned. No! did he say he would go? Oh! Allan," as he rejoined them, "what shall I do without you? Jim was getting on so nicely with his riding; and who will manage about the magic-lantern?"

Margery noticed it all somewhat sadly, the wife throwing her little impediments in the way of what seemed to herself such a plain duty. But she was glad to see by his directions how all-important Allan was in his own home, and certainly they had made a very pretty place of the Priory, and the village looked wonderfully well-to-do, though it had a little suspiciously the air of all being got up for effect, and she did not feel sure the cottages were quite so clean and tidy inside as the lovely flowers in their gardens would lead one to expect.

Lottie kissed her, and said a hundred pretty things, but Margery felt perfectly conscious all the while that the world of the singer and of the petted heiress were different worlds, and points of juxtaposition hard to find. She recalled the time when Lottie had nursed her at Milan, and how lonely she had felt when she had left her. That seemed very long ago now.

"You see," said Lady Mary, who had made a point of coming to call on Mrs. Dalrymple Bruce, the ex-great singer, the artist's bride, "you see how admirably it has all been arranged. It would have quite spoiled your married life if you had been making your way as a singer at the beginning of it, and a young husband easily gets jealous and irritable, and resents being treated as an appendage. Now, in the course of nature, your voice will soon be going off, and so you will leave the stage, and devote yourself to domestic happiness,

and take the proper position of a woman as subordinate to her husband, wonderfully useful of course also at charity concerts and parish festivals. I am delighted to hear of that class too you are instituting. It has all been arranged very well, has it not?"

There was a yearning look in Margery's eyes as they gazed out into the distance.

"We have both suffered," she said, in her bell-like tones, "and others have suffered. As it is, it is well. But it would have been better, I think, if the sin and the suffering could have been spared."

"So dreadfully positive and unphilosophical," said Lady Mary afterwards to Harry Yorke, now her nephew by marriage. "I like to take a general, superficial, æsthetic sort of view of life, like a picture with the lights and shades, no anatomical accuracy as to details. Now as to Mrs. Dalrymple Bruce, she has taken

to charting out her opinions like the Athanasian Creed. Let all who think otherwise suffer accordingly, and so on."

"I think she rather quotes Dalrymple, certainly," said Harry Yorke. "A good trait in a wife that, though."

Mrs. Harry Yorke distinctly did not quote her husband. She was a conventional young lady of the fast school, and was already sending her photographs with a little account of her life—her life, forsooth!—to one of the fashionable papers of the day, and doing a hundred other things, that struck the ladies standing on platforms asking for a vote in the administration of their country, etc., etc., as decidedly not feminine, and, to say the least, unladylike. But she was in a very fashionable set indeed, and was not likely ever to know anything of them, or their opinions. She wore an Ulster coat, and a Billy-cock hat, and smoked while driving Tandem. Harry

was decidedly disappointed in her, but he made the best of it, and the most of his Club, and waxed very wroth at the idea of Woman's Rights, and all the rest of it. Women had a great many too many rights already, and, for his part, he did not know what they were, which was perfectly true. Only it was a pity he spoke about them, that being the case. His book had not been much read, but it had been excellently reviewed, and his opinions carried weight now, as those of a great traveller who had been praised in the *Saturday*. "You wouldn't take him for clever," his friends said of him; "but of course he must be so, and he is a capital fellow into the bargain too." And that he certainly was, but he had made a mistake in his marriage.

When Una came home to the Priory, a little bit of a thing, with a little white face, she looked almost as if she might be Una

Stapleton still, and she wore no crape, so as to indicate her situation, which rather shocked Lottie.

"Why should I mourn for him? I am glad that he is dead," said Una. "Let me play a waltz for the children to dance to. Do, Lottie, let me. I haven't waltzed for a long time, and I like to make people dance."

"It is very terrible to hear her talk like that," said Lottie, gravely. "Has she been like that all the time, Allan?"

"Yes, all the time," said Allan, gravely. "Since the first." He dared not tell Lottie of the destitution in which he had found her. It might have pained Lottie, and Allan always kept back everything that might possibly pain or shock her. But the recollection of it made him pitiful to his sister, though he could not understand her. No one understood her at the Priory. Sir James took refuge in his dogs, and

looked moodily at them. Lady Stapleton said she had a headache, Lottie tried to lecture her, and brought out a Bible. But Una put the Bible on a shelf, and sniffed at some roses, and said, lightly,

"One thing I never was—I never was a hypocrite."

One day she said, in her off-hand manner, "I see you are all frightened of me. I am going to Margery. Margery must have known plenty of bad characters, I daresay she understands dealing with them. Will you lend me some money, Allan? You know I have got none yet. I'll pay you back some day. Good-bye, my dear little sister-in-law, kiss the children for me. I know you'd rather I did not do it myself. Ta-ta all of you—I am off."

Then Allan tried to take the same line with her he took with Lottie when she too had caprices, and he treated Una's idea as something not worth considering, and was

very paternal to her in the man-to-the-woman condescending sort of way. Una made a little face at him.

"I don't think anything of men, not even when they beat me," she said. "Of course, I know you're the biggest, and you've got the money, but I'm going to Margery all the same."

On this Allan waxed angry, as probably she intended he should, and drove her all the way to the station himself without once speaking a word to her. Una held out her hand to him before she got into the train.

"Good-bye, Allan, and thank you," she said. "I appreciate your kindness and Lottie's, and all the good you have meant to do me, but, don't you see, I am in your way, and it is better I should go? Good-bye, Allan, don't be angry. I have been too miserable to stay with such happy people, you see."

He was dreadfully touched by these last

words, but the next moment she was settling herself in the carriage, looking out at him with that terribly provoking, self-complacent air of hers. Allan felt bothered.

But Margery, when she saw her, treated her quite differently. She held out her arms, and folded her in her embrace, and strained her to her heart, till Una was almost suffocated. "Oh, dear Una!" she said. "You dear, dear Una! my heart has so often ached for you."

"Has it, Margery?" said Una, with something of her old affectation of naïveté, but there was a twinkle as of a tear in her eyes all the same. "Sing to me, Margery, will you? I want to hear you sing. I think if I could once cry, life might be different a little."

So Margery sat down and sang to her from an Italian opera.

"That does not touch me a bit," said

Una. "I have heard Patti sing it. She trailed her r's more than you do. Oh, and I have heard it lots of times!"

Then Margery sang again, this time a Miserere, solemn and sad—all the sadder that Margery sang it under her breath.

"Very beautiful," said Una, carelessly. "I always think if I confessed my sins it would not be to music."

Margery looked at her with her hands resting idly on the keys, looked at the little fair face, with its supercilious expression, and, to her eye, its air of outraged womanhood; noted the soft white hands toying with the four-buttoned French gloves, and without premeditation sang out of her full heart,

"I am wearing awa', Jean,
Like snawdrifts in thaw—
I am wearing awa', Jean,
To the Land of the Leal."

As she sang, Dalrymple opened the door and came in, and laid his hand upon Mar-

gery's shoulder, motioning to her to stop, as he glanced at Una cowering back in her arm-chair, the teardrops forcing themselves through her clasped fingers. But Margery sang on steadily, only signing to him to leave them alone together, and he went away noiselessly as he had come.

When Margery had finished, she sat quite still, till Una looked up, and asked, in a broken voice—

"Margery, do you believe in all that, people loving one another, and trusting one another, and being happy and true? Do you believe in being happy, Margery?"

And Margery answered, in her bell-like tones, that, as Lady Mary said, made her feel as if "Let those who think otherwise suffer accordingly"—

"Yes, I do believe in being happy, Una."

Una put up one little hand and brushed the hair off her forehead.

"It seems to me all wrong for women," she said, faintly.

"Worse for women than for men?" said Margery, interrogatively. "What do you find fault with?"

"They dress us like dolls, and they tell us to do nothing. This, that, and the other is not for women, they say, as if *they* knew all about it, and women had no idea what they were made for, only men knew what is woman-like."

"You see, I know nothing about all that," said Margery, gravely, "because I —I, you see, have never been a lady. Women can't do all the things men do."

"No, of course they can't," cried Una, waspishly. "So what is the use of hindering them? We let men alone. I am sure I think half the things they do most unmanly; but we are not always dictating."

"I don't know quite what you want now," said Margery, gravely.

"I don't want anything *now*," said Una, almost angrily. "But if I'd been brought up to do anything, any one useful thing under the sun, do you think I'd have read French novels, and got up an intrigue with Randal the first moment I saw him? If I'd had any one single thing to do, that could interest or occupy any girl in the world? Do you know what Randal said to me once? He said, 'When I first saw you, Una, you'd the spirit and the talent that might have ruled a province, but you turned it all into a low intrigue, and ruined one villain thoroughly. If you'd been what I thought you—innocent, like your face—I believe you could have saved me yet, for I loved you as I can hardly understand loving now.' And Randal was not a fool," said Una, with sudden warmth. "He—I often wonder if anything could have saved him? Not when I knew him, I think—not then. But oh! how I loved him!

I'd nothing else to do. I'd never heard of anything, except falling in love, and being made love to, that was suitable for ladies. Who thought of anything else—who talked of anything else in my old set? We dressed, and we flirted! Married life we never even spoke about. I believe we thought it finished like a novel at the third volume. And you believe in happiness as possible, Margery?"

Margery's fingers trifled with the keys.

"It needs practice, like other things," she said. "It needs exercise of the faculties conducive to it; and they've been neglected for a long time, and all the inherited tendencies are strong the other way. But, yes! if the world turns its attention to it, I see no reason why people should not be temperately happy in two or three generations. We must all work hard, of course, if that is to be; there is so much wrong to be set right. And we

must be willing to sacrifice ourselves. But it ought to cost us the less because we have no choice really. Who with a soul capable of enjoying true happiness can enjoy it now with miserable millions pressing on us all around? But some day? Yes! I look forward, and I see the nations marching on to happiness over our efforts of to-day—yes, even over our aspirations. Everything helps a little. In the meanwhile, I am very thankful and content. I renounced happiness for myself long ago, and as soon as I renounced it, I think I found it."

Dalrymple had returned again, and she had risen from the piano, and was clasping her hands together on his arm, looking into his eyes, trustful, loving, resolute. With that expression she might have said, like the Spartan mothers of old, "With it or upon it," and shed no tear, yet she loved him far above the ordinary love of

wife for husband. It was, perhaps, for that very reason she could so unflinchingly have sent him forth to do his duty and to die.

Dalrymple, however, looked past her at Una, and his artist eye read the trouble in that crumpled rose-leaf of her face.

"There is so much wants righting in the world," he said, "and you belong to another class from ours. You have so much tact and skill—could not you interest your class?"

"Of all things in the world," cried Una, "I will not turn Sister of Charity because I have buried two husbands, and wept for neither of them."

She was suspiciously near crying as she spoke.

"Is it necessary to turn anything to help others?" asked Dalrymple, with that glow in his eyes of long ago. "Can a lady now no longer be a *bread-giver* under

the penalty of losing her old title? Surely it is nobler for the silk dress to help the tattered cotton without any serge masquerade as an intermezzo? And is it impossible for truth to be spoken in a drawing-room? If the deepest realities of life must be shut out by the *portières*, then it is better to be a lackey than a gentleman. He at least goes between, from the street door to the drawing-room, showing up the Duke of So-and-so, keeping back the beggar boy. Those terrible lower orders!—They must be taught their proper places—in the gutters!"

Una lay back, looking at him, with her hands lightly folded.

"Is there really anything worth doing?" she asked.

"The question rather is, are we worthy to do what must be done?"

"That is a grave question," she said. "I should like to hear a politician on this

subject. You, after all, are an artist by profession, and you are tired of painting rags, it seems. I should like to hear what some one said of it all, whose work lay among Blue-books."

"And can you not trust your own judgment at all as to whether there is anything worth doing or not?"

"My own judgment!" said Una, startled. "Appeal to my taste, if you will, my powers of discrimination, of *finessing*—you might even appeal to my feelings—but judgment! Who ever heard of such a thing! And to trust one's own judgment, too! No, Mr. Bruce, in fashionable circles one takes advice. There are people told off to tell one what to do; the only question is which department to consult. Now, do I not speak wisely, Margery? Does not the great doctor consult the great lawyer, and the great clergyman the great doctor?"

"Yes, but whether wisely is another

question. You remember Bacon's Idols? Each profession has its peculiar blinding influence. Like the dark spot in our eyes that sees nothing, there are certain things it never sees. Some day I think people will learn again that judgment is a necessary faculty, and we must each make the best of what we have, not just run each to the other for an opinion, very likely on the very subject on which the other's professional bias makes him blind. We are not each other's conscience-keepers, and must be responsible each for ourselves in the end."

A day or two after this, Una said,

"I never had an idea what Mr. Bruce was really like. I think you must have influenced him very much, Margery. Allan and Lottie are very happy, but you'd have made more of Allan, I see that now. He is a right-down good fellow, and I think more of that now than I used to do, when

I thought all common-place people were good. Now I know it is a very uncommon thing to be. But you'd have made more of him."

"Oh, don't say that, Una," said Margery, with a deep blush of pain, as if she had never been a great singer, and received the plaudits of the audience before the foot-lights, never lived any part of her varied stirring life, but been just a village maiden, young and unnoticed.

"My dear, I have none of those feelings. But do you know, Margery, I've decided for myself what I'm going to do. I have not consulted anyone, and there is not the least need to, because no one's opinion is so well worth having on this subject as mine is. And you and Mr. Bruce ought to be quite pleased with me, because it will fit into your views too, if you like to look at it in that light. I'm tired of seeing people so ill-dressed, and it is all very well

talking of cultivating taste and that sort of thing. I've seen ladies speechless over the Transfiguration, with violet dresses looped up crooked over scarlet petticoats, and such boots and gloves. I am going to establish a School of Dress. Dressmakers may come and learn how to cut out, and the theory of colour, and ladies may come too and learn what they ought to wear. How some things are impossible, and then the first principle of dress, that it is to conduce to comfort. Now if you'll notice, you'll see people in the stalls of the theatre in opera cloaks. Those people have not dressed for dinner; and seated beside them will be others, decolletées a little, and almost cool. They came in fur jackets. And the others think they ought to put on something dressy, and are stifled. Something dressy! That is the way the servant girls ruin themselves. That is where I mean to catch you and your precious

husband. You must be interested in my stopping that. And then think of their health! I mean to teach people that pinched-in waists are ugly, as they really are, and don't bear the slightest resemblance to a slim figure. Take in no one but the wearer! He! he!" laughed Una. "Then I'm tired of seeing ladies cut into geometrical patterns, or tied up in bags, and set to walk about in them with peaked trains they can barely catch up, try how they will. I mean to teach people that different styles of dress suit different occasions, and a picture is all very well in a picture. And then I shall give lessons in the Becoming, how each has her different style. Only the worst is some people think it positively right to be ill dressed."

"Of course there are better ways of spending money."

"My dear Margery, you only show me what a field there is open for me. The

idea of good dressing being necessarily expensive! Of course if people have no taste and no judgment, and like to consult the first authorities, they must pay for their training and natural abilities, but a servant girl might dress on ten pounds a year, and for thoroughly bad dressing commend me to our English nobility, who as a rule are not particularly hard up. Why, you won't know London in a year or two. I shan't countenance fashions that compel women who never have carriages to wear trains, or those who drive out in all weathers to wear tulle bonnets on the backs of their heads. There will be a meaning in the modes I bring out, and especially people shall be taught to consider their styles. Dress has an immense influence on character, as well as being dictated by it. It acts, and reacts. Dear me! I think I must consult a psychologist about that, and, by the way, what is to be done about

Political Economy? Is it not very bad for trade that one year everyone should be smothered in fringes, and next year fastened up with buttons?"

"Very bad, I should think," said Margery, smiling.

"I think I shall take Lady Mary into partnership," said Una, thoughtfully. "She has dipped into all those subjects. And now I think of it, I think I shall have to call myself Lady Talboys again to make the thing go down. I suppose Elise will come back to me now," she added, mournfully. "That woman's is a strange character. She never showed one spark of affection for me, but she said she would come back to me, when I was a widow, and she left me the day I married Randal. The pains she took with my dress that morning! but nothing would induce her to stay with me!"

"Had she ever really any heart," asked

Dalrymple, after Una had described her scheme to him with the prettiest little gesticulations and mock enthusiasm.

"You do not seem to consider that Una means to make it pay," said Margery, gravely. "Mr. Tollemache has ruined her, if she pays his debts, and I am sure she means to do so. She would never bear that people should speak ill of him, she never speaks ill of him herself, and the one thing Una would hate is to be pitied."

"Well, I pity her with all my soul," said Dalrymple.

"Oh, so do I," said Margery, fervently. Then very thoughtfully—"And I recollect when I thought her a being of another sphere, made for the bright side of life, and to be petted and looked up to."

Margery has no child. That might be the shadow of her life, and sometimes she says, with tearful eyes,

"I suppose those women who are loved wives and mothers are the happiest, but if a child had come to me it might have cast a cloud over Dalrymple's boy. Now he will naturally inherit the property, whatever happens to Dalrymple. His uncle says so. And I do not think I could love my own child much better, and he might inherit all my faults, that terrible Travers nature that has already caused so much pain. Now Dalrymple's boy has no faults. I think his mother must have been an angel. Dalrymple has painted a picture of her with wings, watching over her boy, and smiling as she used to do, when he was a baby. It is called 'The Young Pilgrim,' and I think it is the best thing he has ever done. The foreground of that picture with its stones and thorns is a study in itself, and the boy—you know how beautiful he is! with that visionary light in his eyes, and his lips set,

as if he must go a long way, had a long way to go. We hope he will be known as a genius before he has reached the end."

Thus the elder people vest all their hopes, concentrated and intensified, in the young generation growing up, and the young ones look out into the future, hopeful but timid, knowing how high are the anticipations concerning them. It is only in after-years that they too gain Peace.

THE END.

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